Iris Murdoch News Letter

Ball State University, USA and Kingston University, UK

Summer 1998 Number 12

Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch

The following two extracts are taken from ***Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch,*** *by John Bayley, which will be published in the UK in September 1998 by G. Duckworth & Co., and in America by St. Martin's Press in January 1999.*

One: Then

A hot day. Stagnant, humid. By normal English standards really hot, insufferably hot. Not that England has standards about such things any more. Global warming no doubt. But it's a commonplace about growing old that there seem to be no standards any more. The Dog Days. With everything gone to the dogs.

Cheerless thoughts to be having on a pleasure jaunt, or what used to be one. For years now we've usually managed a treat for ourselves on really hot days, at home in the summer. We take the car along the bypass road from Oxford, for a mile or two and twist abruptly off on to the verge – quite a tricky feat with fast moving traffic just behind. Sometimes there are hoots and shouts from passing cars who have had to brake at speed, but by that time we have jolted to a stop on the tussocky grass, locked the car, and crept through a gap in the hedge.

I remember the first time we did it, nearly forty-five years ago. We were on bicycles then, and there was little traffic on the unimproved road. Nor did we know where the river was exactly: we just thought it might be somewhere there. And with the ardour of comparative youth we wormed our way through the rank grass and sedge until we almost fell into it, or at least a branch of it. Crouching in the shelter of the reeds we tore our clothes off and slipped in like water rats. A kingfisher flashed past our noses as we lay soundlessly in the dark sluggish current. A moment after we had crawled out and were drying ourselves on Iris's waist-slip, a big pleasure boat chugged past within a few feet of the bank. The steersman, wearing a white cap, gazed intently ahead. Tobacco smoke mingled with the watery smell at the roots of the tall reeds.

I still have the waist-slip; I rediscovered it the other day bunched up at the back of a drawer, still with powdery traces of dry mud. It is faded to a yellowish colour, with a wrinkled ribbon, once blue, decorating the hem. Could someone, later my wife, have indeed worn such a garment? It looks like something preserved from the wardrobe of Marie Antoinette. I never gave it back to Iris after that occasion, and I think she forgot all about it.

In any case we were having a busy day, that day. We had a lunchtime engagement to get back to. By the time we had cycled back into Oxford, and down the Woodstock Road, we were as hot as we had been earlier that morning, before we had crawled through the dense green undergrowth and discovered the river. Still dripping with sweat, and making vague efforts to tidy our hair and clothes, we rang the bell of a flat in Belsyre Court. As we waited we looked at each other expressionlessly through our busy hands, and just before the door opened, we burst at the same moment into a soundless fit of giggles.

Our host, who had been getting lunch, was quite a long time coming to the door. He was a brilliant young doctor with green eyes called Maurice Charlton. When even younger he had been a classics don at Hertford College, and considered one of the best in the university. So good at it indeed that he gave it up after three years and turned to medicine. He now held a research appointment at the Radcliff Hospital. He was supposedly rather in love with Iris. That was why he had asked her to lunch. She had told him she was spending the morning with me – we were going out to cycle together to see Cassington Church – and so could I come too?

He took it like a man. He had prepared a delicious lunch. The flat was not his own but belonged to a rich older don at Oxford, with whom he may or may not have had an ambiguous relationship. He seemed able to borrow the flat any time, for his friend lived mostly in college when he wasn't away in Italy or Greece.

Fifty or so years ago life in the university was more constricted and formal, and at the same time more relaxed and comfortable. For us, in those days, there was no paradox involved. We maintained standards and conventions almost without being conscious of them, while leading our own lives. We worked very hard, at least Iris did: I was more naturally indolent.

Maurice Charlton probably worked harder than either of us, or both of us together, I should say. But he was totally relaxed, his green eyes sparkling, and with a delightful air – as soon as he saw us – of collusion in something or other: what he had been doing, what we had been doing. This intimate feel, as if we could become naughty children together at any moment, was enhanced by the sombre dignity of the flat: full of rare books, good furniture, glass. I still remember the long stemmed green and white wineglasses, out of which we drank a great deal of very cold hock. It was the normal white wine, I think, in those days.

I feel admiration now for the way Charlton must have apprehended that we had been up to something together, and not only took it in his stride but encouraged us in some way to enjoy it with him. We had never got to Cassington Church we said. It had been far too hot. We had cycled back in an exhausted state, and it was wonderful to be here in the cool, drinking the wine. We both said something like this without looking at each other. Iris jumped to her feet to go over and kiss Maurice Charlton, and it seemed just the right and spontaneous act, making us all three laugh, we two men laughing both at and with Iris as she gazed delightedly round the dark and as it seemed, rather mysteriously grand flat, as if she were Alice in Wonderland on the threshold of a new series of adventures.

As we sat laughing and eating – I remember lobster and the delicious garlic mayonnaise our host had made – I was conscious of my soaking trouser-pocket, where Iris's undergarment reposed, rolled up. I hoped the wet wouldn't get on

the dining room chair which was covered in some sort of damask. As lunch went hilariously on we seemed more and more like a family. Through the bewitching miasma of hock I was conscious of Iris as a kind sister, fond of both her brothers, equally close to them. Maurice had the air of a brother, but also looked like a sort of patriarch as he sat grinning benignly at the top of the table.

Maurice Charlton died young, of cancer, I believe, more than twenty years ago. My impression is that he never married, but I may be wrong about that. He certainly looked at Iris with his green eyes as if he liked her very much. It was possible he had borrowed the flat and prepared lunch with a purpose, and that my presence had thwarted his plans for the afternoon. In that case I admire his behaviour all the more, at this distance in time. He carried off perfectly what well might have been for him a frustrating situation.

I mention the lunch with Maurice Charlton, and that enchanted Sunday morning when Iris and I had our first swim together, because I remember it all very vividly, not because it had any great importance in itself. Although I had met Charlton a few times, and admired him, that lunch was probably our only social occasion together. He continued to work in Oxford but we lost touch with him, which is why I don't know what happened to him later, except that he was a distinguished man when he died. It was typical of my relations with Iris at that time that I had very little idea of the other people in her life, or what they might mean to her. That was probably due to the ecstatic egoism of falling in love for the first time. For me it was the first time, though I was not exactly young. Iris was thirty-four, Maurice Charlton was about the same age. I was twenty-eight. Difference in age, which means a good deal at school time and not much in later years, was only part of the atmosphere of that lunch party, because we seemed for the moment like a family. And a family takes such differences in age for granted.

But, as I say, I still had very little idea of the other people in Iris's life, or what they meant to her. That was instinctive on her part, I think, rather than deliberate. There was a lot of privacy about in those days. A more "open" society is what we aim for now, or say we aim for, as an enhancement of our now being more classless and democratic. We were not consciously undemocratic, I think, in the fifties, but we took private life for granted. That was particularly true in Oxford, still a scholastic society in which one could be on good terms with a large number of people, meeting them most days in college, at dinner in hall, or in lecture rooms and laboratories, without having any idea of how they were situated domestically, or socially, or sexually. Other people's lives might seem intriguing which was part of the fun of privacy, but they remained what was on the whole an accepted and comfortable blank.

By some odd emotional paradox being in love made me, at least at first, not less but more incurious about this. Iris existed for me as a wonderful, and solitary being, first seen, about six months before, bicycling slowly and rather laboriously past the window in St Anthony's College, where I was living. Trying to work, and gazing idly out at the passing scene on the Woodstock Road, now intolerably full of traffic but then a comparatively quiet thoroughfare, I noted the lady on the bicycle (she seemed at once more of a lady than a girl) and wondered who she was and whether I would meet her. Perhaps I fell in love. Certainly it was in the innocence of love that I indulged in the momentary fantasy that nothing had ever happened to her: that she was simply bicycling about, waiting for me to arrive. She was not a woman with a past, and an unknown present.

She was looking both absent and displeased. Maybe because of the weather, which was damp and drizzly. Maybe because her bicycle was old and creaky and hard to propel. Maybe because she hadn't yet met me? Her head was down, as if she were driving on thoughtfully towards some goal, whether emotional or intellectual. I remember a friend saying playfully, perhaps a little maliciously, after she first met Iris: "she is like a little bull".

It's true in a way, although I have never seen it, because of course I have never seen her objectively. But if each of us resembles some sort of animal or bird, as our personalised bestiary emblem, then I can see that Iris could indeed be a small bull. Not unfriendly, but both firm and unpredictable, looking reflectively out from under lowered brows as it walks with head down towards you.

In her first published novel, *Under the Net*, it is remarked of the leading female character that she never lets on to any one of her friends just how closely bound she is to all the rest of them. Few of them even know each other. That was true of Iris. Naturally enough it made quite a difference to the heroine of the novel, but it has never made any difference for Iris. She always used to write back to fans who had written to her, Careful, long intelligent letters, directed to a person, not just a fan. They were real letters, even though she had never met, or probably would meet, the real person to whom she was writing. I have to try to write letters back to her fans now, and naturally enough I can't do it like that; although from their letters, and their attitude towards their adored author, I see why one of them at once replied, after Iris had written to him, that he felt now they had become "pals for life".

Like so much to do with our emotions the egoism of love has something absurd about it, though something touching as well. It was certainly absurd that I should have taken for granted in those days that Iris was, so to speak, pure spirit, devoted to philosophy and to her job, leading a nun-like existence in her little room in college, devoid of all dissimulations and wonderings and plottings and plannings that I took for granted in myself. She was a superior being, and I knew that superior beings just did not have the kind of mind that I had.

Besides there had been something almost supernatural about the way I had actually met her, after I had seen her riding past the window on her bicycle. The following day I had encountered Miss Griffiths in the street, outside the Examination School where university lectures were given, A diminutive figure, she was just taking off her billowing black gown, preparatory to mounting her own bicycle and cycling home to St Anne's College. She had been lecturing on Beowulf. Miss Griffiths has a soft spot for me ever since my Viva, when she had congratulated me on my essay on Chaucer's *Knight's Tale,* but caught me out on a minor question of Anglo-Saxon syntax. After I had obtained my degree she had followed my career, such as it was, with benevolent interest, and now she seized me by the arm as I walked past and enquired how things were going. Things in fact were barely going at all, as I had no proper job, and stayed on sufferance in the newly found St Anthony's College, where I was supposed to act as a tutor and a guide to a few ebullient Frenchmen and Americans who had come to study science and politics there.

St Anthony's at that time was a study in itself, but its principal interest for me now, and in memory, was its proximity to St Anne's College, a foundation designed at the time solely for women students, although like most other colleges it has since become bisexual. Out of the deference I felt for an older and senior member of the English Faculty I walked a few yards that morning beside Miss Griffiths, who showed no immediate disposition to mount her bicycle and be off. I think she wanted to enjoy reminiscing for a moment about the exam and the Viva – like most dons she was vain of her examination exploits and technique – and to recall with the pleasure of generosity her discernment about the good points of my Chaucer essay, as well as to remind me, with the pleasure of superior knowledge, about my errors in Old English grammar. Having done those things she

suddenly asked me if I would care to come to her college room for a drink that evening. I was happy to accept.

Although it was just across the road from St Anthony's, I had never been into St Anne's, which I regarded as an all-feminine province, likely to be virtually out of bounds to males and male students. I wasn't wholly wrong about this. Incredible as it may seem today, there were then fairly strict rules governing the conduct of men who had the nerve and temerity to go visiting in these female strongholds. They had to remain in the public parts of the college, and the girls were not allowed to receive them in their rooms. The matter was in any case of little or no interest to me. Students like myself, who had been in the army at the end of the war, were older than the new generation of undergraduates, whom they were sometimes employed temporarily to instruct owing to the post war shortage of teachers. Oxford at the time seemed to me like a school; apart from having to teach a few of them I took no account of its younger denizens. The cinema was my resort for relaxation and refuge, and cinemas were cinemas in those days. In the afternoon they were church-like spaces dense with tobacco smoke, inhabited by couples, or by solitary worshippers motionless in the darkness, illuminated from time to time by the glowing tip of a cigarette.

The idea of a drink with funny wizened little Miss Griffiths – I imagine she was only a year or two over forty, but if I thought of it at all, I thought of her as having passed the boundaries of age – was a decidedly agreeable one. Drinks were drinks in those days, just as cinemas were cinemas, and I had heard that Miss Griffiths – "Elaine" as I afterwards came to know her – liked a good strong drop of gin. Besides it could only be a good thing to be on social terms with a senior member of the English Faculty, to which I aspired in time to belong.

All such prudential considerations vanished when I presented myself a six o'clock that evening. Miss Griffiths was just finishing a tutorial, and as I knocked on the door a young girl in a scholar's gown came out, dropping her eyes demurely at the sight of a man standing there. I barely glanced at her, for through the open doorway I had caught sight of the person of the bicycle – the woman? the girl? the lady? – standing and talking to some unseen character, with a well-filled glass in her hand.

She looked different from the bicycle lady, naturally enough. This was a social scene and she was not wearing an old macintosh. Her short fairish hair, unkempt and roughly fringed on the forehead, looked both healthy and greasy, as it still does. Later on I was to cut it and shampoo it for her now and then: at that distant time she hardly bothered. Indeed I have the feeling that women then – certainly academic women – were nothing like so attentive to appearances as they are today, when girls may look like scarecrows, but only of set purpose. Slovenliness in those days was next to seriousness, at least in university circles. It was rare, however, for women in those circles to wear trousers. Iris had on a worn and grubby tweed skirt, rather overlong and ungainly. I noticed her legs were short and robust, clad in brown cotton stockings. Nylons were still uncommon in the early fifties.

This woman certainly had a serious look, and it dawned on me that my bicycle lady, who this clearly was, must be an academic of some sort. That gave me an immediate feeling of despondency. Just as my fantasy when I first saw her was that she had neither a past with others nor a future without me, so now I was reluctant to feel that she could be anything so commonplace as a university don. It placed her; and I disliked the idea that she should be so placed, even by myself. At the same time I was heartened by her general appearance, and its total absence of anything that for me in those days constituted sex-appeal. There was nothing so conventional about this woman. She was not "a girl", and she had no girlish attractions. That made the fact that I was in love with her much more exciting; and it also seemed highly satisfactory, for what, as I instantly realised, was a rather ignoble reason. Since she had no obvious female charms she was not likely to appeal to other men.

Why I was so convinced at first that there was nothing sexually attractive about Iris is a complete mystery. Other people, of both sexes, certainly didn't think so. It was my naïve and now inexplicable assumption that she could only appeal to me, and to no one else, that stopped me seeing how fearfully, how almost diabolically attractive everyone else found her. They knew more about such things, I suppose.

"Ah there you are John. I may call you John, mayn't I?" Miss Griffiths gave a characteristic small giggle. "Meet Miss Ady, and Miss Murdoch. Iris, this is one of the more promising young ones in the English School. Very good results in Finals. I caught him out over Old English grammar, his weaker side I fear, but he did a beautiful piece on the *Knight's Tale*".

That bloody *Knight's Tale*. Was I never going to hear the end of it? Iris Murdoch gave me kindly look, said "Hullo", and continued talking to Miss Ady. Miss Griffiths handed me a glass, from which I at once took a desperate swig. I coughed, and felt myself going scarlet in the face. It was a strong gin and french, the English equivalent of an American martini – no ice in those days of course. Although I had become accustomed to strong drink in the army I had barely touched it during my student days. I had lost the taste, and besides it was too expensive. Iris and her friends drank a lot of it, and for me that was the first of many.

I resented Miss Griffiths referring to me as one of the "young ones" in the English School. I was not particularly young. Were these women so much older? – for I now saw, and with a certain satisfaction in spite of my embarrassed state, that I was the only man in the room. There were four or five women at the party, and as a result of my confusion and fit of coughing they were all looking at me in a kindly way. Obviously they took it for granted that I was a clueless young creature, and that it behoved them, as sophisticated women of the university, to be nice to me.

But they all seemed to want to talk to Iris. I was left with Miss Griffiths, who was herself looking at Iris with a wistful expression, which even at that awkward moment surprised me.

What I had not the slightest idea of was that St Anne's, at that time, was a hotbed of emotion. The dons in general were not, so to speak professional lesbians. Many were, or had been, married: they led domestic as well as academic lives. They were clever donnish women, hard working and conscientious, but a lot of feelings ran beneath the surface, and I had the impression later on that they seemed to catch such emotional intensities from each other, like germs or fashions. Some time afterwards I heard the novelist Elizabeth Bowen, who had become a great friend of Iris, describe an acquaintance as "an old-fashioned lesbian of the highest type". Elizabeth Bowen's inimitable stutter on the "L" sound made this sound both grand and comic. The ladies of St Anne's were not grand exactly, but their type, I'm sure, was both high-minded and sound. Whatever they felt among themselves was never communicated to their pupils, nor were their pupils ever roped in. I had Iris's word for that, much later on. Any suggestion that one of their girl charges had been made advances to, or encouraged in a crush for one of them of her own, would have been universally frowned upon.

In any case I had simplistic ideas about sex at that time, supposing that everybody must be one thing or the other. When it dawned on me, a short time after the party, that they had all seemed to be in love with Iris, I had a sensation of despair. If they all felt like that about her, didn't it follow that she must feel the same about them? – at least about one or two of them? Iris was, as I realised later, much too kind to discourage affection, even yearning affection, but she drew the line if it was expressed too physically. She never went to bed with any of her colleagues,

or indeed with any other woman, although the novelist Brigid Brophy tried very hard indeed to persuade her. That was both before and after we were married.

Miss Griffiths seized her colleague in the English department, a lady with a resounding Polish surname, introduced me to her, and made thankfully off to join the little group around Iris. I saw the dashing Miss Ady, dark- haired and with beautiful eyes, tap Iris playfully on the wrist while emphasising some point to her, perhaps about their teaching: for Miss Ady, I afterwards discovered taught politics and economics, while Iris handled the philosophy. The Polish-sounding lady, who wore a black coat with a scarlet lining and seemed to me equally dashing, departed from the party's air of cheerful frivolity by asking in an intense and as I thought foreign tone a serious question about my "research". My reply failed to carry conviction to myself, or, it seemed, to her. Her gaze was forgiving but also, I felt, a little reproachful.

Instead of talking to the person I had fallen in love with, or even meeting her properly, I seemed destined as a result of Miss Griffith's heaven-sent invitation only to make a decidedly mediocre impression on another of my senior faculty teachers. I discovered afterwards that Miss Griffith's colleague was well known for her air of severity among pupils and colleagues alike, but that she was in fact a kind as well as devoted teacher, married to a Polish officer during the war. She was herself from Yorkshire and bore some sturdy name like Sidebotham, but preferred to retain the more romantic patronymic she had acquired from an absconded husband.

I never managed to talk to Iris at that party, although at a later stage, and after two or three other men had arrived, I hovered vainly near her, seeming to exchange words with every other person present. After a few of those gins and frenches I felt I could have made a good impression, but no opportunity arose, and Iris excused herself and departed well before the gathering dispersed, amid much conviviality.

The god of chance seemed however to be in long-suffering mood. After seeing me fail to make anything of the unexpected coincidence he had arranged, he patiently set to work yet again. Asked to supper three weeks later by a couple who knew a friend I had not seen for years, I discovered that Iris was my sole fellow-guest. But I soon felt that I was failing again. Although friendly and not at all shy, Iris was not a helpful conversationalist. I offered openings and raised points in what I hoped was an interesting way, but she smiled kindly and did not respond. Like many philosophers in Oxford she had the habit of considering what was said in a silence that was judicious, almost sibylline. She turned my poor little point over as if asking "What exactly does this mean?" and if she decided it indeed meant very little she was too polite to say so. Mutual enthusiasm failed wholly to take fire. I was comforted to observe that our host, a lively law fellow who was clearly hoping to pump Iris about the fashions and topics of contemporary philosophy, fared no better than I did. At the same time I resented his air of knowing her so well that he could often appeal to jokes or thoughts they had in common, or jolly times she had shared with him and his family. My solitary bicyclist, I felt, should not have been happy to go on holiday with these people. I became prey to retrospective jealousy. I began to see that there was a lot that Iris had done – must have done, during those long years I had not known her – which I could not approve of, which was not suited to the image my fancy had officiously formed of her.

Quite abruptly, and early, Iris said she must go home. Our hosts looked disappointed. For the first time I managed to seize the moment, and I said regretfully that I must go too. Our hosts looked more philosophical about that: it was Iris they had wanted, and almost greedily, to stay; and I was surprised by this, because as a guest she had seemed to take very little trouble, if any, even though she had disseminated around her what seemed an involuntary aura of beneficence and good will. But she had not risen at all to the law fellow's blandishments, his attempts to interest her in his ideas and persuade her to set forth her own. To have observed this gave me some satisfaction.

Goodnights being said and the front door closed we unlocked our bicycles and set out together into the damp mild Oxfordshire night. My lights were in order; her front one dimmed and wavered on the verge of final extinction, and I respectfully urged her to bicycle on the inside, and to keep as close as possible to my own illumination. Then we rode in silence, and I assumed it was to break it that she asked me in her friendly way if I had ever thought of writing a novel. It was a wholly unexpected question, but for once I had an answer ready. Yes, I had: indeed I was writing one, or trying to write one, at that moment.

This was not strictly true. It was nearly true and I determined on the spot and as we rode to make it true that very night. The wife of my professor, a sweet tremulous woman whose father had been a well-known critic, had asked me the same question about a month before. I had given her much the same disingenuous reply; and by way of encouragement she had suggested with a gentle smile that we should both try to write one – she wouldn't mind having a go herself. With some laughter we had made a pact to see who could finish first. I had since attempted to have a few ideas, and I had thought of an opening for the first chapter, but I had done nothing.

But why should Miss Murdoch ask me about novels? It must be to indulge me and get me to talk about myself, for clearly she, a philosopher, could have no interest in the matter. She probably never read them; far too busy with higher things. I made some deprecating comment to this effect, and the next moment could hardly believe my ears. Miss Murdoch said that she herself had written a novel, which was shortly to be published.

I felt overwhelmed with awe and admiration. So this extraordinary creature had thrown off a novel, as if negligently, in the intervals of a busy life of teaching and doing philosophy. What could it be about? I ventured to ask. "You mustn't tell anyone", she said, stopping her bicycle and putting a foot to the ground. She looked straight at me, speaking lightly but also very seriously. "I don't want anyone to know".

I gave a fervent undertaking. I would not reveal her secret to a soul. I was overwhelmed with joy that she could have confided this secret to me. She must for some extraordinary reason not only have complete trust in me, although we had scarcely met each other, but with a swift and masterful decision have concluded that I was just the right person – the one who ought to know. Why? I could only marvel, and be aware that my heart was bounding with gratitude and joy. As well as with love of course. I really felt as we stood there in the dark road, half on and half off our bicycles, that this wonderfully intuitive and perspicuous being had seen right down inside me, liked what she saw, judged it worthy of her fullest trust. Perhaps even loved what she saw? Could she have known that I had fallen in love with her, and had decided like a philosopher, on a ground of reason and good sense, that she was also in love with me....

Two: Now

Jan 1st

Didn't Margaret Thatcher, at the mention of whose name Cloudy always starts barking, used to say there was no such thing as "society"? She didn't put it in inverted commas of course: she knew what she meant. But her point wouldn't have been so

obviously untrue if she had said there is no such thing as the "people", a word that today only achieves some sort of meaning if placed, whether accidentally or deliberately, in a given context. It made sense afterwards to say that Diana Princess of Wales was "the people's princess", because when she died everybody grieved, publicly and together. But "the people" are a fictitious body, invoked by politicians in the interest of democratic emotionalism, whereas "society" is still a neutrally descriptive term, making sense in any context. The only way "the people" can be contextualised is as "ordinary people", another purely emotive phrase which has just been used by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his New Year's speech on TV. Every "ordinary" person is in fact extraordinary, often grotesquely so, and in every sort of way.

Pondered such matters while making Iris her drink, after the Archbishop's speech. Important to make a routine of this. Around twelve o'clock or a little before. The drink itself is slightly dishonest: a little drop of white wine, a dash of angostura bitters, orangeade, a good deal of water. Iris likes it, and it has a soothing effect, making her sit watching TV for longer periods. Otherwise she is apt to get up and stand with her back to the TV, fiddling incessantly with her small objets trouvés – twigs and pebbles, bits of dirt, scraps of silver foil. She also puts water – sometimes her drink – on the potted plants by the window, which are now wilting under the treatment. But she never does this with a real drink, an alcoholic one. Sensible girl, her old fondness for bars still stands her in good stead.

Feb 20th

Teletubbies. They are part of the morning ritual, as I try to make it. I have to insist a bit, as Alzheimer's now seems to have grown inimical to routines. Perhaps we all know by instinct that adopted routine preserves sanity? Just after ten, as part of the BBC 2 children's programme, the Teletubbies come on. One of the few things we can really watch together, in the same spirit. "There are the rabbits"! I say quite excitedly. One of the charms of this extraordinary programme is the virtual reality landscape supplied. An area of sunlit grass – natural – dotted with artificial flowers beside which the real rabbits hop about. The sky looks authentic as well, just the right sort of blue with small white clouds. The Teletubbies have their underground house, neatly roofed with grass. A periscope sticks out of it. A real baby's face appears in the sky, at which I make a face myself, but Iris always returns its beaming smile.

The creatures emerge, four of them, in different coloured playsuits. How are they animated, what is inside their plump cloth bodies? The way they trot about and smile is almost obscenely natural, as are their grown up male voices. Twiggy or something, Winky, Poo . . . They trot about, not doing anything much, but while they are there Iris looks happy, even concentrated.

This form of childishness is itself like virtual reality. We used to have a more genuine spontaneous kind. It began, just before we were married, with a postcard of a very clueless looking kitten putting its nose wonderingly round a door. Appropriately labelled "Ginger". Iris sent it to me, making a balloon on the front and writing in it "Just coming". She became Ginger, and then Gunga.

"Haunted by Gungas" I teased her the other day, will be the title of the first section of my autobiography. She laughs and is pleased to be talked to that way, but I don't think she recognises the word any more.

Something about the Teletubbies reminds me of going to see the bluebells in Wytham Wood. Since living in Oxford and finding out about this amenity we have been to see them every year. Coming on them if the sun is shining has something of the beautiful dubiousness of Teletubby land. Can they be real? Do they really exist? They live in a thick part of a wood, under the dark conifers which stretch away downhill, and as they recede into darkness they light up into their most intense colour. They vanish as if into a strange land where an endless dark blue lake begins. Close at hand they look much more ordinary. Greyish, purplish.

We stand and look at them. For the first time last May, Iris seemed not to take them in at all.

On the way there are real trees. Two gigantic sycamores, overpowering a cathedral. But Iris has now a great fear of trees and I hurry her past them. I thought: this had better be the last time we go. And that was last year.

As we got in the car I said to her reassuringly "Soon be back in Teletubby land". But I don't think she remembered what the Teletubbies were. I would quite like to be able to forget them myself.

The sense of someone's mind. Only now an awareness of it; other minds are usually taken for granted. I wonder sometimes if Iris is secretly thinking How can I escape? What am I to do? Has nothing replaced the play of her mind when she was writing, cogitating, living in her mind? I find myself devoutly hoping not.

March 1st

When Iris's mother was taken into the mental hospital we did not tell her where she was going. I had doped her but the drive seemed interminable. As the nurse took her away she looked back at us with a lost unreproachful look.

The same look on Iris's face when I manage to leave her for an hour with a friend.

Like school. Being left there. Probably such moments would not be so painful now if they hadn't started all those years ago at school, inside one's own ego.

I knew where I was going when I was taken to school. But being left there felt the same as the look on Iris's face, and her mother's. In fact we retrieved her mother after she had been a few weeks in the asylum. Back again later. So it was like school.

Associations of that look. Seeing it I remember the first little boy I met at the school, after being left there. He was wizened, like a little old man, with a pale leprous skin. I shrank from him, all the more because he was extremely friendly. Confidential. He said: "Shall I tell you what my father told me? My father said it was the most important thing there was. He said there is no difference at all between men and women. Absolutely none at all".

I regarded the little boy with horror and fear. It all seemed part of this nightmarish new world of school. At the same time it seemed the worst thing I had ever heard, or was ever likely to hear.

* * *

Long piece in London Review on Iris's essay collection, *Existentialists and Mystics*. The critic made a great thing of the contrast between Iris's views on the novel, the importance in it of free and independent individuals, character creations etc., and her own practices in writing fiction, which instead of giving her characters "a free and realised life make them as unfree as pampered convicts". This has always interested me too. In one way it is an obviously true point: in a more important sense it is irrelevant. For Iris makes a free world in her novels, which carries total conviction because it is like no other, and like no one else's. That is what matters, and that is why this world has such a mesmeric appeal for all sorts of different people.

It is bound to be a tautology to talk about "freedom" in a novel, in which only the author is free to do as he likes. Pushkin, and Tolstoy following him, liked to emphasise that their characters "took charge", and that they were surprised by what they did, and by what happened to them. Once again there is a kind of truth in that, but it won't really do. It is a cliché which novelists invent or repeat. What matters is whether the world created is both convincing and wholly sui generis, and here of course Pushkin and Tolstoy pass with top marks. So does Iris in her own way.

I remember the time, years ago, when I was working on a study of Tolstoy, and we used endlessly to discuss the sort of perplexing questions that arise in the case of great novelists. I used to make the point that Tolstoy's greatest and least visible strength, or "freedom", was the cunning way he blended many different novel tactics when creating a character. At one moment they behave, as if deliberately, like "people in a novel"; at the next they are suddenly like people we know, as inconsequential as people in life. They seem entirely themselves, as created characters, but the next moment they are behaving just as we might do, so that one can feel in a rather eerie and disquieting way "How does this writer know what I am like?"

Tolstoy's people are both completely particular and completely general. At this point in my argument (such as it was) Iris used to look thoughtful. As a philosopher she wanted to get things more clear than that; and I used to think that perhaps there was a real incompatibility between the philosophic mind and the simple undifferentiated muddle in which free characters and creation must move. Tolstoy, I felt, was not clear-headed at all; he merely picked up one thing and dropped another. Plato wouldn't have cared for that, or for Tolstoy, or for the novel generally?

Your characters, I used to tell her, have contingent aspects because you know that there are so many contingent things in life, and therefore the novel must have them too. But contingency in some novels is not like that; it is glorious in itself and has no other purpose that to be itself. It's always funny, like the dog in *Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

Is there a dog in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*?"

"I think so. I hope so, but I may have got the play wrong. Anyway you see what I mean?"

Iris always, and as if indulgently, did see what a I meant, though it didn't necessarily mean anything to her. We loved those conversations, usually over food or wine. Only for a few moments or minutes did they bother to last, with the gramophone playing in the background. It all seemed funny too. But I was surprised how much of what we touched on, all clarified and sharpened, is there in the essays collected in *Existentialists and Mystics*, now superbly edited by Peter Conradi. Peter pointed out a lot of things to me, which he said were like things in *The Characters of Love* and *Tolstoy and the Novel.* It hadn't struck me before, because those words between us, now vanished, just seem part of us both, although how that can be when our minds were so different - hers clear, mine muddled – remains a mystery.

We can still talk as we did then, but it doesn't make sense any more, on either side. I can't reply in the way I used to do then but only in the way she speaks to me now. I reply with the jokes or nonsense that still make her laugh. So we are still part of each other.

March 30th

The horrid wish, almost a compulsion at some moments, to show the other how bad things are. Force her to share the knowledge, relieve what seems my isolation.

I make a savage comment today about the grimness of our outlook. Iris looks relieved and intelligent. She says: "But I love you".

* * *

Iris surprised me when the radio was on and we were having lunch – toast, cheese, beetroot and lettuce salad – by asking, "Why does he keep saying 'education?'" She sounded anxious. Anxiety and agitation are so much a part of her speech now, like the unending query "When are we going?" But lunch and supper are usually quite peaceful times. Trying to make everything as much a reassuring routine as possible. But now something on the radio has very unreassured her. Government ministers say "education" so often. It ought to be a soothing word, even if a comparatively meaningless one.

It occurs to me that Iris is worried that it might mean something different now, which she has failed to grasp. In a sense of course that is true. It refers to skills with computers and such, which we know nothing about. But I think it is the frequency of the word in political speech that bothers her. It is almost like her own queries.

I try to say something about the importance of education, and everyone getting enough of it. Iris still looks anxious. "Do they read books?" I wonder whether education now chiefly means reading books, as it did when she was at school and college. Her coherence perturbs me. Normally now sentences trail off, become deadlocked – start again in another place. Only anxiety queries complete themselves, and this seems to be one. I remember the kindly specialist at the hospital advising that another word suggested from outside can as it were clear the circuit, temporarily allay the language anxiety. "It's a question of learning I suppose. As we used to." Her face does clear a little. Learning is not a word one hears much now, and certainly not "book learning". "Education" has taken over. But learning is, or used to be, the more specific term.

When land is sold and money spent,
Then learning is most excellent.

The old rhyming proverb returns to my head – is it borne on the same mysterious circuitry that has failed in Iris's case?

* * *

"When are we going?"

"I'll tell you when we go."

Iris always responds to a jokey tone. But it is sometimes hard to maintain. Violent irritation possesses me and I shout out before I can stop myself. "Don't keep asking me when we are going!" Only a short time ago, as it seems, this would have registered as a "tantrum", and the circuit would have visibly adjusted itself and responded with that mixture of amusement and forbearance, complete understanding, which survived as an automatic but infinitely welcome response. One notices that a lot of women respond to snappish husbands in public, and no doubt in private, too, with what Milton, describing Eve, tellingly refers to as "sweet austere composure". The opposite of understanding. Eve was the first to rail herself off in sex disapproval.

Iris never did that. She never got cross herself, and never does now: but when I did so in the past she would soothe me by a particular sort of reassurance, implying that I was most loveable and close to her when I was angry, silly, or tiresome.

Now her face just crumples into tears. I hasten to comfort her and she always responds to comfort. We kiss and embrace now much more than we used to.

* * *

Often something that Iris says now, or a word that she repeats, starts me off too on some more or less dotty train of association. I remember her mother with early Alzheimer's – not diagnosed or labelled then – used to repeat a word in a touching way, as if it were a talisman or portent. If somebody said "journey" or "Baron's Court", where she lived, she would go on repeating it at intervals, and the same if the word happened to be "shandy" or "ham and cheese". Once the mind attends to this involuntary habit it becomes a conscious one. I become aware that the word "learning" had been popping up at intervals in my mind, and so play with it idly.

Significant, perhaps, that [it] is in some way a competitive word. A learned man stands out from his fellows: an educated man does not especially do so. Hence education is a more OK word, something we can all have if the government goes about it the right way. It used to be normal to try to shine, to have read some book or books that others had not, to be able to quote. Lord Birkenhead or someone like that proclaimed in the 30s – was it in Oxford? – that there were still "plenty of glittering prizes for the sharp sword". The comment was adapted, ironically, by Auden in his poem "Oxford", so attitudes to that sort of thing must already have been changing. If prizes are given now they must be given to all. In theory at least.

It's a relief in a way that things have changed. The atmosphere of "learning" is always tiresome, can be oppressive. Even my dear Barbara Pym, whose novels I am so fond of, must have been awful when she was young, and all her sort, too, because they were always trying to dazzle with clever remarks, or by neatly capping quotations. Innocent enough, and rather charming in her early novels, but it must have been fatiguing in life. Socially speaking, people thought they had to <u>try</u> in those days.

Iris is a great contrast with all that. When young she was formidably learned, but I'm sure it never showed. Perhaps considered unsuitable for serious women to show it? Male dons certainly vied with each other, and I remember disliking it while trying to keep up with it. Nowadays common room conversation is blessedly untaxing. But does "learning" require some sort of overt display, like a bird's feathers, to show how important it still is, or should be? It would have been thought odd if Prime Minister Blair had proclaimed his new government's policy to have been "Learning, learning, learning", instead of "Education, education, education". In spite of its competitive nature learning is ideally an end in itself, and no government particularly wants to encourage that, or to pay for it either.

April 15th

Moving from stage to stage. How many are there? How many will there be? I used to dread her moment of waking, because the situation seemed to strike her then in full force, at least for a minute or two. Reassuring noises, so far as possible, and then she would go back to sleep and I would sit beside her reading or typing. The sound of it seemed to help as reassurance. Iris's greed for sleep had something desperate about it, and yet she slept, and still sleeps, so easily and so long that it was a great mutual comfort. Lying beside me she is like an athlete who had passed on the torch to a back-up member of the relay. I couldn't do what she had done, but I was doing something.

Not a good metaphor though. It would be truer to say that I myself was reassured by her unawareness of anything that I might be doing on my own. Where work was concerned we had always left each other alone, so that being cut off now about such things was positively welcome. The simpler and more primitive our needs and emotions now, like those of babies to mothers, the more absolute they feel. The exasperation of being followed about the house now by Iris is as strong and genuine as is my absolute need for it. Were she to avoid me, or "tactfully" leave me alone, I would pursue her as anxiously, if not quite so obsessively, as she now pursues me. I don't feel any particular pleasure or emotion when her face lights up at the sight of me, when I come back to the car after ten minutes shopping. But I remember it if I wake up in the night, and then reach out to her. The "lion face" of Alzheimer's used to be transformed in that way when her mother saw daughter Iris. Not that Iris's face has grown expressionless as her mother's used to be. Sitting waiting for me in the car she looks quite alert and amiable, and passing strangers smile at her.

But thank goodness the stage of that old despair on waking seems to be over. Now she makes a soft chuckling sound and looks at me like the Teletubby baby in the blue sky on TV. No anxious queries. We exchange a few of the old nonsense words before she goes to sleep again. As the condition gets worse it also gets better. It seems to compensate each new impoverishment. Should be more thankful for that . . . .

The editors wish to thank Professor Bayley for his kind permission to print these extracts.

*

The Occasional Clergyman

I began wondering if a collection of Iris Murdoch's characters in holy orders would form a class, and if it would be possible to find descriptive aggregations or even deductive arguments about them. Would they make themselves up as they went along? It would be simply wrong to assume from common authorship that the creatures would share an identity, flow into one another, take up in one novel what had been parsonically transacted in the last, as if Mr Punch's truncheon needed from time to time a sparring partner dressed in a cassock. But the possibility of there being such a thing as an Iris Murdoch clergyman occurred to me . . . .

. . . In *Under the Net* no clergyman appears, only an ominous simile. The narrator wished to blow the wall-safe in his friend's Holborn flat. There was not the slightest crack on the surface of the safe to poke the explosive into: "the whole thing was as smooth as a bishop's hand". There are hackneyed comparisons for smoothness: velvet, babies' bottoms. Here is a quick, unflattering invention which has the air of already being proverbial.

First, is the headmaster-in-holy-orders. Before we meet Giles Everard in *The Sandcastle* (he is skilfully kept back until chapter 5) the hearsay is conflicting: an ass who "casts down his eyes like a milkmaid if he meets a member of the opposite sex," or a rarity, "a man without any malice in him." The wise money is on the opinion that if he is a fool in authority, that "spoils his other good qualities." When he steps forward in the novel, none of this is contradicted. "Mr Everard had a plump healthy face of the kind that passes imperceptibly from boyhood to middle age

without any observable intermediate phase. He always wore a tweed suit and a dog collar. His expression was habitually gentle, his eyes doe-like. His hair was light brown and rather fluffy and unruly. As a boy he must have been pretty; as a middle-aged man he appeared candid and disarming to those who did not see him as looking stupid."

A Sunday afternoon sermon is provided for him. It is not a good sermon. What he says may be formally true, it may even hit the nail on the head as far as the plot of the novel is concerned, but it is not in the least interesting. This is something which everyone in the school Chapel understands, as it were to reinforce the schoolboy conviction that eternity is dull as well. Iris Murdoch conveys, without vilifying Everard, what it is like for religion in mild hands to feel inauthentic. She reinforces this by adorning another of her characters, a despised art master, with eloquence about painting and truth, and about the virtue of humility (which will be defined later on professionally in *The Sovereignty of Good* as selfless respect for reality). Less friendly, she permits the Reverend Giles Everard, in the revealing way in which he decorates his house, makes coffee, or orders lunch, to have insipid taste, and as a clumsy host to have reached "an unprecedented degree of dreariness." To describe him as "faintly ludicrous, and in some obscure way appalling" is the *coup de grace* . . . .

If we omit the highly sympathetic portrait of the Abbess, and stick to parsons, *The Bell* includes Fr Bob Joyce. "He had a bulging face and eyes glittering with conviction. He smiled, revealing a dark mouth full of much filled teeth, and then gave Dora a piercing look which made her feel shifty." After this start, a blank: he is named very occasionally at service times. We never otherwise meet him, a mass-priest as invisible as the postman. It is deliberate. A substantial Fr Joyce would have threatened the entire plot of the novel. Unstable religious and sexual frustration billow in the absence of the most elementary professional ministry. It is a would-be clergyman, not a genuine one, who is the leader of this community in all its pretension and destructiveness.

The occasional clergyman is absent from *The Flight from the Enchanter* and *A Severed Head* . . . . [but in] *An Unofficial Rose* . . . . Douglas Swann, a smooth Church of England rector, a touch too attentive to his parishioner, the English dog-rose of the title, threatens not only to be as absurd as the reverend headmaster of *The Sandcastle,* but also to be sexually frail. He is described as "a good looking man with a sallow face of great smoothness which seemed not to know of the razor. . . His very dark hair, lacquered with hair oil, was combed in a neat crust over his brow. He had, with his rather smart black suit and crisp dog-collar, a professional air of slightly self-conscious benevolence, a sort, as it were, of clinically compassionate stoop. . . the context for thinking him an ass was almost completely there" were it not for his intelligence.

He is quick to pronounce on matters of the heart. He cannot help plonking, and reaching for complacent generalisations which are chilling or irritating to listen to. To advance the plot, Iris Murdoch exploits his pastoral tactlessness. It is brilliant. When the sentimental rector enunciates Church of England talk about indissolubility and its policy against the re-marriage of divorced persons, the effect of a sanctimonious exposition is not only to expose its lack of realism, but also to convince his good parishioner in a flash what love demands: she must set free the husband who has deserted her for his mistress, and free herself. This glorious release (release is the mission of the Church) is quite the opposite of what the clergyman intends. The humdrum incapacity of the parishioner subsequently to act upon what she has discovered about love has nothing to do with the rector. He vanishes from the story . . . .

1966 . . . was . . . just the moment to relish the arrival of South Bank paperback theology trying in its earnest way to take atheism in its stride. [In *The Time of the Angels*] Iris Murdoch provides one who had devoured it: a talkative bishop with "small hands and feet and a clean boyish face" who appals old-fashioned members of the liberal Establishment with evasions in the face of reports that the newly appointed City rector does not believe anything. Between utterances of sublime poppycock, the bishop, who is advanced enough to address strangers by their Christian names, eats treacle tart and asks for "some of that delicious crumbly cheese. . .and that superb claret." Although the ecclesiastical plot of the novel is implausible, the satire is horrifyingly accurate. It is a dark judgement and ought to be compulsory reading for the episcopate; but the theological darkness is most dazzlingly and ludicrously conveyed when the novelist permits the rector's brother to fall into the rectory coal hole during a power cut.

Carel Fisher, a married vicar who seduces a coloured servant girl has become a recluse. His wife has died. He refuses to see callers or to answer letters. His "curious solitary gaiety" is afflicted by hallucination. "He complained of a black thing which kept whisking out of sight." Idle, lonely, incestuous, he is caught abusing his invalid daughter. To convey the deadlines of this diffident minister and his pious lechery, much the most effective ruse is to keep him hidden, with the blinds down, wearing dark glasses. By daylight the rumour of evil is disappointing. So through many chapters he is fugitive, detected only by the swish of his greasy cassock. His one face-to-face conversation turns out to be melodramatic, a pompous derivation form Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, futile. This, after all, is the era of the breakdown of Christianity and the twilight of the gods. A second daughter discovers that he is dying of an overdose, and does not seek help for him. The miserable rectory will be demolished. So too will be the innocent Wren tower.

Thanks to the lighting effects, the clergyman is difficult enough to discern anyway; but he is specially difficult to discern as a clergyman. Between his sordid amours and his suicide, the only action he performs is to strike his brother in the face. There is light liturgical support for this in the obsolete practice of cuffing a catachumen to drive out the devil. But since there is no evidence of church or congregation or parish for ministry, we are left with a *magical* idea of priesthood only, too insubstantial and theatrical to be taken seriously, except as propaganda. . . .

Henry and Cato . . . must be one of the three best books on negative theology that have ever been written. John of the Cross tried it elegantly, with short poems about unrequited love and immense footnotes. Pseudo Dionysius wrote enigmas, like Wittgenstein. Dame Iris Murdoch turns the *via negativa* into a remarkable novel which anyone can read. For this she needs two occasional clergymen, one as romantic as Sartre, the other as wise as Plato.

On page one we are introduced to an immature priest attached to a Catholic mission in Notting Hill. It is after midnight, in the mist. He is trying to throw away a revolver into the Thames from Hungerford Bridge. Fr Cato Forbes is "a tall man, broad shouldered and now a little stout, with a big head, thick pouting lips and plump cheeks, large brown eyes, and thick straight hair which since he had become a priest, he hacked jaggedly short." The mission has been a flop. The other members of "the elite order" to which Cato belongs have flitted. Cato, idle, wearing a stinking cassock, a whisky drinking chain-smoker, persists in the condemned premises off Ladbroke Grove. Ludicrous as it is that such a beginner should be abandoned so smartly by his religious order, the plot depends on it. For he loses his faith. He was "a provisional priest from the start" says his mentor Fr Brendan Craddock at the end of the story.

He is referring to Cato's late vocation from a rationalist atheist upbringing (Cato's father thinks, "the notion of survival after death is the most morally debilitating idea ever invented") and to his conversion. It is touchingly described. Cato found himself "invaded by Christ" and tripped into reality. He suffers a Trinitarian revelation "a sort of white joy." He uses the language, without attribution, of Meister Eckhart. He courts austere practices in retreat and the tenderness within suffering. Those who are professionally interested in the formation of the priesthood would already be doubting Cato's candidature for ordination, and would be recommending very close supervision if he was to go forward. But Fr Brendan, of good Catholic family, Downside and Oxford, who lives "in meticulously spartan luxury in a small flat" in Bloomsbury is intellectually far too agile for Cato, and too severe in his virtue to rescue Cato from his tiresomeness.

Brendan Craddock has long eyelashes, is "good looking and foppish wearing a well cut black suit with his dog-collar, a black velvet jacket in the evening. . . .Tall with glossy straight black hair and brilliant blue eyes." Just as Cato's sitting and thinking instead of saying mass, is a very convincing example of jejune affective prayer – "Unpriest him and there would be nothing left. He was so much a priest that surely he must be able to make God to be in order to sanction his calling" - so Brendan's interrogation of Cato is brilliantly portrayed as being sympathetic but slick. "The priesthood is a long job. . . one doesn't rush out instantly when things are dull and rewards fail. . . . Make a hole in your world, you may see something through it." But he turns Plato's machine upon Cato to great effect in seeking to explain the whereabouts of God when Cato is sure there is no one there, by equating this with the painful discarding of the tissue of illusion about oneself which unselfishness requires.

Fr Brendan's end-game admits that God is unimaginable, that affirmations about God need to be denied, that silence has its place in the argument, that death is instructive. This is fugitive theology, difficult to get into the open, and Brendan knows that he can sound phoney. The great value of the book is that these technical conversations between the clergy illustrate where the limits come in thinking and conversing about it. For the *via negativa* is being pursued in the fun and terror and intricate symbolism of an enthralling plot, with all its astonishing turns and escapades as people try to divest themselves of their possessions or their responsibilities, of their understanding, even of their imagery; and for this no theology is required.

The story is full of jokes of the King Lear's Fool variety – "Did Odysseus get drunk on Calypso's' island?" – "the need to pray remained obsessive . . . like an illness" – "People like Cato invent God. He exists for them. . . We lesser folk just sponge on the God that holy men invent" – even sour ones like "human beings are endlessly ingenious at promoting their own misery." But *Henry and Cato* remains a comedy, a divinely apophatic comedy . . . .

Iris Murdoch persists with the diligent, odd priest, an accomplished visitor, who enjoys the company of her characters in *The Philosopher's Pupil.* Father Barnard Jacoby, homosexual, chaste, Jewish, is "a tall, handsome man. . . his straight sleek hair parted in the middle and falling in fine order to the level of his chin. He had a large nose, and rather shining or luminous brown eyes. . . thin, with thin, mobile hands. He always wore a black cassock, clean, it was somehow typical of him to have fans." He is direct about his task as rector, skittish, inquisitive; but when the Philosopher asks: "Do you believe in God?" answers "No." He loves celebrating the Eucharist. (How difficult must it be actually *to perform* the Prayer Book liturgy of 1662 without for a moment disturbing the shallow, fashionable complacency of disbelief which he admits to? The sacrament is a performative utterance, and though the insincerity of the celebrant does not frustrate it, it might be expected, with the usual nimbleness of grace, to help to undermine disbelief.)

A *tour de force* is the conversation which is called for by the philosopher who is looking for someone to talk to. Fr Bernard is flattered to be asked. He is philosophically illiterate. The other is no teacher; he enjoys being jarringly impolite in exposing meaningless propositions. The exchanges are awkward. There are many *lacunae.* Bernard is driven into offering incorrigible religious intuition, and gets a little philosophical support for this. But his inconsistency is shown to him as fatal. It is good sense not just cruel logic that says he cannot continue in holy orders if he has abandoned his professed belief and his obedience to the Ordinary. Bernard is too naïve to defend himself. His ministry, which is full of genuine kindness and of instances of swift mercy, is effectively destroyed by his attempt to hold a conversation with a professionally ruthless philosopher. Naturally gregarious, off he is sent by the storyteller to seek an eremitic life of penance in some cave . . . .

Is there any modern novelist more fascinated and haunted by the tradition of English Christianity, or more sympathetic, and dissatisfied, with the religious and moral aspirations of her many characters? How, in the middle class intellectual indolence, they will persist in asking one another about God, and about Jesus, and about the strange muddle of Anselm's Ontological argument! Is there a more observant chronicler of these secularising superstitious times, and, in particular, of the collapse of frail Christian ministry into absurdity? To seek in Iris Murdoch's pages for Geoffrey Chaucer's good man, the *povre Persoun* or for Anthony Trollope's Mr Harding, or for Jeremy Taylor's sweet *Rules and Advices* for an exemplary vocation, would be to miss the fun which her lively fragment of occasional clergymen cannot help foolishly and fearfully providing. The laughter is important. In her professional and artistic task to dispel illusion, she is close to Langland and Wyclif, in passionately desiring a truthful description to reform the modest English clergy, and to clarify their metaphysics.

Canon Reginald Askew.

Our thanks to Canon Askew for his permission to print this extract. ***"The Occasional Clergyman"*** *is written for a Festschrift for Dame Iris (see last News Letter).*

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Review: ***Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity.*** Fergus Kerr (184pp SPCK London, 1997).

This book is a record of Fergus Kerr's 1994/5 Stanton Lectures in the Philosophy of Religion, given at the University of Cambridge. His general theme is "the religion in some recent philosophy" – more specifically, the surprisingly insistent presence of religious issues and motifs in a surprisingly wide range of recent philosophical work. Apart from the two chapters devoted to theologians (one on Barth, and one on von Balthasar and Rahner), the thinkers discussed are Martha Nussbaum, Martin Heidegger, Luce Irigaray, Stanley Cavell, Charles Taylor and Iris Murdoch. Kerr devotes a chapter to each, aiming to show how their thought is more or less explicitly shaped (although in very different ways) by an engagement with religion.

Two things are immediately impressive about this book: its range and its clarity. Although none of Kerr's chosen writers are exactly obscure, neither do they form part of the mainstream of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy. Heidegger continues to labour under suspicions generated as much by his political record as by the tortuous rhythms of his prose, and Irigaray's feminist project is too intimately tied up with her readings of the history of philosophy, and her relations with her French contemporaries, to be easily accessible. Of Kerr's other four subjects, only Cavell's prose style poses an equivalent challenge to one's sense of what philosophical writing should look like; but Nussbaum, Taylor and Murdoch create parallel problems by variously refusing to accept certain key assumptions about the relations between the form and content of philosophical writing, and about the relationship between philosophy and other disciplines (such as literature, psychology and theology).

By focusing on such thinkers, Kerr therefore sets himself a number of exegetical challenges; and the degree to which he succeeds in meeting them is commendable. Assuming no previous acquaintance with each body of work, he manages – in the space of around twenty-five pages – to motivate some of the central questions that engage its author, and to lay out some of the key lines of argument that their writings are designed to support. He is patently well-acquainted with the texts concerned, but he never allows that erudition to get in the way of his reader's understanding; and it is difficult to imagine anyone coming away from this book without at least taking seriously Kerr's implicit belief that these writers have produced some of the most stimulating, profound and salutary philosophical writing of the century.

Kerr's chapter on Murdoch certainly shows that her work merits such high praise. He examines her rejection of the fact/value distinction and ethical voluntarism, details her enthusiasm for demythologised religious thinking, and outlines some aspects of her debt to Plato – in particular, her sense of the ethical import of art. Kerr is tactful but suggestive in his critical remarks; he raises questions about Murdoch's rather unqualified enthusiasm for Cupitt's theological revisionism, and highlights the apparent contradictoriness of her emphasis upon attention to concrete circumstances and the material world more generally on the one hand, and her distaste for incarnational religion on the other. He is more reliant on other secondary texts than his endnotes make clear (particularly the work of Peter Conradi); but his interpretation is reliable and thought-provoking.

I think, however, that Kerr's project as whole cannot be said to be entirely successful, primarily because of the form in which it is cast. First, it simply isn't possible to provide anything more than a highly selective and extremely simplified portrait of authors such as these in the space of a short chapter. Those already familiar with the work discussed will feel uncomfortable with the necessary simplifications, and inclined to contest the principles of selection; it often means that the ground Kerr covers has been surveyed in more nuanced detail by other commentators (to whom Kerr often directs us); and it risks leaving readers new to this material feeling more frustrated than stimulated by their sense of receding horizons. A book twice as long might have been more than twice as good, since it would have allowed Kerr's very compressed evaluative remarks to be developed and defended at the right level of detail.

It might also have allowed him to make his individual chapters rather less self-contained; as things stand, the book's overreaching theme is so general that it is difficult to see how the work to which each chapter is devoted might really engage with that of its conscripted companions. Plainly, certain themes are common to many of the authors studied —the intertwining of the ethical and the religious, the contemporary value of Ancient Greek thought, the ambivalent stance of Christianity towards the material realm; and Kerr does a good job of signposting some of them. But he also accurately conveys the degree to which each author's approach differs very significantly from that of the others; and without the space necessary to show how each approach might be brought into dialogue with its peers, he risks the criticism that his chapters amount to a series of ably-ventriloquised monologues rather than a conversation.

It is also unclear why Kerr devotes two of his eight chapters to theologians rather than philosophers. If the point of the book is to hold up for examination the ways in which philosophers find themselves pressed to engage with religious motifs, the material on Barth, von Balthasar and Rahner seems simply misplaced; but if that material is meant to show how the philosophers studied might benefit from a more-informed perspective on recent work in theology, then Kerr's way of presenting it seems misleading, and more work needs to be done on exactly how these connections are to be made. Once again, I do not doubt that Kerr could do that work, any more than I doubt that his chosen philosophers could be made to converse with one another in very interesting ways; but the format of his book prevents him from making more than a start on that important and timely project.

Stephen Mulhall
Department of Philosophy
University of Essex

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Editorial Changes

Peter Conradi is focusing his attention on writing Dame Iris's authorized biography and has had to cut down on his other obligations. Professor Conradi will continue, for a short time, to act as Advisor to the News Letter. Anne Rowe takes over as European Editor.

The other editors would like to thank Peter Conradi for the invaluable contribution he has made to the production of the News letter since taking up the European Editorship in 1995. His incomparable knowledge of Murdoch studies and his professionalism have been a great asset. We offer Peter our good wishes for the production of the biography and our congratulations on his Honorary Research Fellowship at UCL and his Visiting Research Fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, for 1999.

Forthcoming

Among other articles **in the next issue** of the Iris Murdoch News Letter, Priscilla Martin will review E.P Thompson's *Beyond the Frontier;* Fergus Kerr will review Barbara Heusel's *Patterned Aimlessness: Iris Murdoch's novels of the 1970s and 1980s,* and Cheryl Bove will review *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* edited by Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker. There will also be reviews of John Bayley's *Memoirs* of Dame Iris, a review of "Iris Murdoch's Giffords: A Study of the 1982 Gifford Lectures", and a review of George Soule's compound bibliography of Brookner, Drabble, Murdoch and Pimm.

Bibliographic Queries

Murdoch has influenced, or has relevance to, many contemporary writers. The editors would be pleased to hear of any references readers may find to Murdoch, however fleeting. Please send any item you think to be of interest, either to Cheryl Bove or Anne Rowe.

The Iris Murdoch Society

The Iris Murdoch Newsletter is the publication of the Iris Murdoch Society, formed at the Modern Language Association convention in New York City in December 1986. It appears annually, offering a forum for short articles and notices, and keeping members of the Society informed of new publications, symposia and other news that has a bearing on Iris Murdoch and her writings. If you would like to join the Iris Murdoch Society and automatically receive the News Letter please contact:

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The Iris Murdoch Society donated £100 to The Alzheimer's Disease Society last year.

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Iris Murdoch News Letter

Ball State University, USA and Kingston University, UK

Autumn 1999 Number 13

Iris Murdoch 1919-1999

Obituary
A Personal Memoir by Philippa Foot:
IRIS MURDOCH

On 8 February Jon Snow interrupted the Channel Four News to say that a report was coming in of the death of Iris Murdoch a few hours earlier in the Alzheimer Home in Oxford's Botley Rd. For the next few days there were many long obituaries, and many tributes and discussions of her work on television and radio. The public facts of her life are well enough known: a first in Greats in Oxford, a spell in the Treasury during the war, work with refugees in UNRRA, a research scholarship in philosophy at Cambridge, a tutorship at St Anne's College, Oxford, and marriage to John Bayley at the age of 37. Meanwhile, there were novels, plays, poetry and works of wide-ranging philosophical interest. Finally, the dementia of Alzheimer's disease in which John looked after her with the utmost love until, no longer remembering how to eat or drink, she spent a brief, serene period in the wonderfully kind care of nurses at Vale House.

This part is easy to tell. But it is much harder, even for someone who knew her for more than 55 years as I did, to set down what was so extraordinary about Iris. We lived together for two years in the war, and she and I were the closest of friends to the end. Yet I never felt I altogether knew her, perhaps because she was a private person, frank but yet unwilling to volunteer much about herself. It was, I am sure, part of her magic that nothing that she said or did had to pass through a filter of self-preoccupation or presentation of herself. In company she was often rather quiet; her novels show a marvelous talent for comic invention but she was never an entertainer. Kind to a fault, and absolutely loyal to old friends, she liked above all to listen, especially to anything that could tell her of bizarre happenings or strange characters. I once asked if she never found anyone boring and she replied at once that she never did.

As to her life, it was as extraordinary as she was herself. Although she had many devoted women friends, she was adored by - it seemed - practically every man who knew her! She had many passionate love affairs, suffering much as they ended, and suffering also through the death of two men in particular whom she had dearly loved. E. P. Thompson's brother Frank, a poet and a haunting figure to many of my generation, had been at Oxford with Iris for a year before the war. (He was shot in cold blood after capture during an ill-equipped and ill-fated partisan expedition in Bulgaria where there is still memory and a place named after him.) The other, Franz Steiner, a refugee scholar, died suddenly in Oxford after the war, and Iris was sunk in grief.

Her great good fortune was to be loved and captured by John Bayley. She wrote to one correspondent that it was "a perfect marriage" and to another that every day spent away from John was "a day wasted". The marriage was totally necessary to her and it was important to her work that there was an orderliness to the life that she and John had together, in spite of the almost creative untidiness of their house. For Iris must have toiled hard each day to achieve as much as she did. Moreover, every day she would write long hand-written letters to the many strangers who poured out their troubles to her and asked her advice, receiving the encouragement of her interest and concern by return of post.

John and Iris always lived in or near Oxford and, in spite of her love of London and her many friends there, Oxford was at the centre of Iris's life. Even as an undergraduate at Somerville she had sat at the feet of the renowned classical scholar Eduard Fraenkel and he had been one of the first of many very distinguished men to come under her spell. In Greats she was taught philosophy by a much-revered tutor Donald MacKinnon; his friendship was crucial to her in her early years and his deeply religious outlook certainly influenced her philosophical work. In truth, the names of those with whom she early formed close relationships of different kinds would read like a litany of well-known figures of the Oxford of yesterday. Later, teaching philosophy at St Anne's, she was an inspiring tutor. Soon, however, she moved out of the orbit of Oxford analytic philosophy, preferring mostly to write essays relating philosophy to literature, art and politics rather than working on more crystalline topics in the manner of Russell, Wittgenstein, Anscombe or Dummett. No doubt it will be chiefly as a novelist that she will long be read

and studied, but as a philosophical essayist I think she will also live on. What is certain is that Iris is irreplaceable in the lives of her friends.

O Professor Philippa Foot
(Somerville 1939)
Honorary Fellow of Somerville.
(First published in *Oxford Today*, Vol. 11, no. 3, Hilary Term Issue 1999, p58)

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The following recollections of Iris Murdoch by the eminent moral philosopher, Philippa Foot, the historian, Eric Christiansen (New College, Oxford) and the writer, Josephine Hart, are published as a tribute to Iris Murdoch who died on 8th February, 1999. (These pieces come from John Bayley's and Peter Conradi's forthcoming Festschrift for Iris Murdoch.)

"Iris at home in London"

Iris and I were at Somerville together, though I hardly knew her then. She, reading Classical Mods. and Greats, had come up before the War, whereas I, in three-year Philosophy, Politics and Economics, arrived only in 1939. But we both left in 1942, and our friendship began that summer when, told by Donald Mackinnon that I was ill and struggling with Finals, she came to my lodgings with a bunch of flowers. We had each of us been taught by Mackinnon, who was soon to be a great influence on our lives, but as he was nearly thirty, we were apt to think of him then as if he were a prophet with a beard, being astonished years later to find how close in age he was to us.

After Finals Iris disappeared to work in London while I worked in Oxford, and we saw little of each other until I got a job in London in 1943 and went to stay with her in 5 Seaforth Place, which is an alley way running off Buckingham Gate. I meant to find a place of my own, which indeed I did; but as Iris said she supposed that we would in future spend half the week in her flat and half the week in mine it struck us that one flat would be better than two, and I stayed on in that strange series of open 'rooms,' then above a warehouse, but earlier having been a storage area with stables down below.

Let me try to give a picture of our life in "Seaforth" as we always called it, its number being rather notional as it was the alley way's only front door.

First of all, the fact that it was War time dominated the scene. The worst of the bombing of the City was over, but even before the terrifying advent of the flying V1 and V2 bombs, there were many air raids and people from the devastated East End were sleeping in bunks on the platforms of the tube stations, trekking in to central London each night and out to work in the mornings. Strangers sheltering in doorways would sometimes accompany each other home until the last of us had to go home alone. Iris and I suffered only a window blown in one morning, finding the alarm clock officious when it went off five minutes later! But alone in the flat one or other of us might sleep for shelter in the bath tub under the stairs, kept awake by discomfort and the magnified sound of rats who seemed to be scrabbling at its sides.

Life was spartan in Seaforth. The blackout for the skylight doubled as a bed covering, so that I was instructed on my first night there to pull it down over me once the lights were out; and when the weather was really cold we would put on our overcoats over our clothes before we got into bed. In the day time, an ancient gas fire, which was the only heating, gave us a few pale inches of wartime gas. Mercifully there was always enough coming through the equally ancient gas cooker to allow us to take hot water bottles to bed, but, of course, in the end rubber bottles were no more and unyielding stone things had to take their place. Hot water bottles have appeared quite often in Iris's novels and I am not surprised.

Then, of course, there were the food shortages, mitigated for us by the fact that a Lyons tea shop across Victoria Street gave us not only breakfast warmth but tea or coffee and sticky buns. Sometimes, though I think it cannot have been very often, we ate in pleasant restaurants in Charlotte Street or in other

Soho haunts, while older, richer friends like Thomas Balogh or Nickie Kaldor would take us out expecting to pay for the meal, as men at that time usually did. The five shilling limit on restaurant meals which did a lot for social justice in a time of strict rationing was, in any case, in force. I do not remember that Iris and I felt poor: the problem was to find the things that one really needed in the shops.

Clothes rationing did not, I think, worry us much. But the fact that we had only three pairs of shoes for the two of us was troublesome given the amount of walking that had to be done. When Iris's one pair was being mended she had to wear a pair of mine, and I remember bitterly complaining that I got them back as 'flat bottom boats,' which was what they were called from that time on. In a way, however, it was odd how much life went on in spite of the strange conditions. We would walk across London to parties, and stand waiting for the last underground train home in front of the East End families already bedded down for the night. We even gave one or two parties at Seaforth, and I only wish I could remember more of the people who came. There must have been poets and others who Iris had asked but I remember only Tambimuttu, the editor of a current poetry review. On my side there was my sister Marion and cousin Rosalind. And there were people like Tommy and Nickie, originally my friends, but now very much Iris's too. Stevie Smith used to come, and I think Jane Degras, through whom I knew Stevie, and the ex-burglar and author, Mark Benny, who lived with Jane.

My memories of the years that Iris and I lived together in such amity are full of laughter and many small jokes. We were, after all, still young and ready for silliness, as when we decided to tell each other of the men who had asked us to marry them. My so called 'list' was soon done, and as Iris's went on and on I suggested crossly that it would be quicker if she told me of the ones who hadn't asked her rather than those who had. But of course there was anguish too, not only about our love affairs, but about men who were away at the war. On one terrible day, alerted by Donald Mackinnon, I had to go back to Seaforth to tell Iris that Frank Thompson, whom she loved dearly, had been taken prisoner with an ill fated Partisan group in Bulgaria, and shot by allies of the Germans in cold blood.

What was Iris like in those days? She was serious and orderly, sitting down to read the moment she came in to the flat and tidying things away if I left them out. Already she had written a novel about which, sadly, I remember practically nothing, except that it was set in London and contained a character called Stuart! There was never any doubt but that she would do something extraordinary later on, and she did not dissent when I said that she had, as I did not, an entry in an imaginary diary reading 'Mem. To make my mark.'

Above all there was a magic about Iris, generally felt, and by women as well as by many men. The magic had, I think, much to do with the way she combined reserve and spontaneity. Obviously she lived deeply within herself; and yet she was completely present, a wonderful listener and apt to ask questions that made others seem more interesting to themselves. Absolutely loyal to her oldest friends through all her years of fame, she aroused great devotion in them. It may seem a strange idea, but the thought sometimes comes to me that for all the delights of her novels, and the interest of her philosophical works, she herself was better than they are.

Philippa Foot,
Oxford, 1999.
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Iris Bayley: A tribute in small change

She became a friend about thirty-three years ago, when I was a younger colleague of John Bayley. This is not a long stretch, compared to the duration of most of her friendships; but it seems to deserve some sort of thanksgiving, even in the form of trivial reminiscence.

In those days, her amicability was puzzling. Was it kindness? Pity for the intellectually infirm? Or was it a sort of transferred pastoral concern, something the wives of older fellows did, to prevent the young ones going sour too soon? At any rate, it was a blessing: a life-line from a brighter world to the half-lit

routine of history tutoring. But it was possible to draw pay from an English university and still care so little for the things that mainly concerned Iris, that her strongest appeal was her capacity for cheering people up. She had a kind face, seldom betrayed impatience at the opinions of others, and was game for almost any sort of social experience short of stag-hunting. New College quad had many admirable properties, but gaiety was not one of them; except when Iris used to drop in for a picnic.

At first, there were misunderstandings about ingredients. Indoor picnics of that era tended to include a few small eggs, some ersatz caviar, runny cheese, and a chicory salad dressed with nine parts oil and one of lemon juice. The aim was not to satisfy hunger but to do the right thing by the guest. In this respect, it misfired. She never actually flung her plate to the floor, or threw the eggs out of the window; but she brought the feeding business down to earth. She would arrive with a shopping basket form which she supplied the neglected essentials. Bread, always white. English cheese, by the pound, not the triangle; waxy and unimpressionable. Butter: slabs, hot pats in white paper, from New Zealand. Ham with plenty of fat and breadcrumbs about it. No pansy pastries from Palm's: the true jam-tart, as served to the boys of the Remove. So there was food on the table; the food she brought; and a small stock behind the door, in case something went wrong. After a while, I got it right.

Less easily, the intellectual part of the picnic. As a novel-reader, I assumed that her main business was writing them, and philosophy was a task from which the profits of fiction had freed her. It was hard to imagine that anyone possessed of the most enviable of talents, that of making the improbable seem real, should waste her time doing the opposite. But talk about fiction revealed a lack of common ground. Here is a peevish note from the early seventies.

"Iris is not a great reader of novels. She is a reader of great novels. Her view of literature is along an airy corridor, decorated with statues: Plato, Dante, Shakespeare, Dickens &c".

She certainly didn't view it as a cross-section of the London underground during rush hour. She happily denied any knowledge of many less-than-Shakespearean works and when asked whether her selection of the significant few masterpieces was not capricious, or even accidental. She answered:

"No, it is not. Their ideas are the valuable ones. None of us could face life without them, so to speak. And at least we know that they had them. Look here, if you can find some other chaps who had them first, you must let me know their names".

This cut out some empty words about unmemorable works. She wanted at least a hint of greatness in what she read, and she knew where to find it. It was Magee who got her to define art as "close dangerous play with unconscious forces," but unfortunately not in time to save me from telling her the merits of authors who worked on different principles, e.g. Surtees or Lord Berners.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of her own novels she liked getting small things right, and she collected details. When told that A had thrown her drink at B and had then bitten C in the leg, she asked:

"Now (to rhyme with "flow" rather than "bough") at what point exactly did she say those words 'I have been wanting to do this for a very long time?'"

"After the wine was thrown. Or it wouldn't have been a surprize and she might have missed".

"Would she not have said 'do that', rather than 'this', if the action were completed?"

" Possibly. But it was after, I know it wasn't during".

" Look here, this is not by any chance a fiction is it?"

Then there was trouble with history - one of her favourite subjects despite its essential lack of satisfactory conclusions and its record of unalleviated pain. Her questions were usually about the things historians are not expected to discuss; certainly not qualified, anyway. She wanted some kind of moral autopsy. She wanted a meaning. So, to check these disturbing tendencies, I answered her questions with a flow of directionless anecdote, sagas of futile endeavour and moral equivocation. In vain. She listened patiently to the Schleswig-Holstein Question, more than once; to the story of the great Paraguayan war; to the colonization of Greenland, and to the decline of the Icelandic Commonwealth; to almost anything that might escape incorporation into a larger picture. In vain. Having listened she would ask with a smile:

"But these chaps. I suppose they were, in their way, aware, so to speak of a greater good?"

"All too aware" was not the right answer. It was better to keep off Ireland, since even Iris finds the end-results of that history discouraging. Poland was a different matter: "Ah, the Poles," she would say; and

her face lit up, as if, in that case, the tribulations of the past had been endured to some purpose, and the devil had been defeated not so much in battle as in argument. Not that she has an irrational aversion to armed conflict. When I mentioned a friend whose great regret was that he had not been born in time to play a part in the second World War, she agreed that that indeed was a time when all good men had felt obliged to enlist:

"Absolutely. And yet I find it easy to imagine that having found himself in the front line for the best of motives, a good man might still throw down a rifle and run".

"Well, he wouldn't get very far".

" Why not?"

"Because I find it easy to imagine that I would be his officer, standing with a revolver directly behind him".

Once, she came right out with it and assured me that there was no understanding history without Hegel. I muttered that his *Philosophy of History* appeared to be utter drivel. She replied with the impatience of a Saint:

"Of course, it's no good attempting that unless you begin with the *Phenomenology Of Mind*".

That was not a corker; it was a good laugh. There were many more, on less solemn pretexts.

Gossip should have played a large part in these meetings, but it didn't, because she is not very good at it. Her intense interest in others is untainted by malice, or by adverse comment of any kind directed towards any individual. With groups, it is different; now and then she let fly at a number of barn-doors, such as progressive education, but not so virulently as to punctuate any named progressive educator. This kindness was no doubt insufferable for the true gossip of the Bowra school, but I never heard her friends complain at her preference for discussing heroes rather than villains.

On the days when friends were gathered near the snappish log fires in the micro-baronial back room of Cedar Lodge, Steeple Aston, there were no dull moments. She and John were all the better hosts for seeming to be guests at their own parties, while not losing interest in those who were there by invitation. She had a way of staring down at her glass, as if she were listening very carefully to the speaker. As indeed she may have been, but she was also indicating that the glass was empty. She loved the crowded room, the voices, the possibility of multiplying pleasure through many conversations; and that, with the help of John, is not the least of her achievements, however evanescent it seems in comparison with the rest.

Eric Christiansen,
New College, Oxford, 1998.
O Iris Murdoch estate.

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Iris Murdoch
December 15th 1985

Hugely pregnant I almost stumbled into "The Connaught," racing to meet an author who had years ago, in a sense, stolen my mind. Dazzled by her novel *The Black Prince* I wanted to produce it as a play.

Iris Murdoch, an intensely physical presence, sat in one of the very grand chairs in that very grand lounge smiling calmly, quietly at me as I approached. She was dressed in what I later had learned was her favourite colour blue, which strongly emphasized her cornflower blue eyes. The Irish have a theory about blue eyes....

"I'm Irish, too," she said. A point through our treasured friendship which she was to make often. Iris has a steady way of gazing at the person to whom she speaks, which combined with the sturdy completeness of her figure, is both arresting and calming. It's as though she is saying, "Rest, just a for a moment, rest and think".

We had a four hour lunch. She spoke to me with such directness and wisdom I felt as though she

knew something about me which I myself didn't quite understand. She spoke of her own life – of the War and its aftermath and, at one point, I wept. I had the most complete conversation I have ever had in my life. It was as though we shared in those hours what Yeats once described as "the awful gift of intimacy". It was not so much that it was private conversation – it was almost secret and it had a profound effect on me. From that day, I have loved Iris in a way which, apart from my family, I have loved no one else.

Her novels, which first drew her to me, are of course thrillingly clever, witty, exciting and often shocking. They have translated wonderfully onto stage and into film. But their great enduring power lies beyond that. She is the novelist who guides her reader down the labyrinthine paths of their own minds – where sudden terrors, or conversely, shafts of insight may change everything or nothing. She looks full-face at sin and frighteningly at its redemptive after-shocks. She writes of the entwining of Eros and Thanatos and warns us of "the false pair and the true pair". That Eros is also the God of Art she makes clear in *The Black Prince*, and that writing is a small gift one lays before him. This "humility in all things" is something she shares with Eliot and is, perhaps, a truer mark of greatness than any modern writers realise.

But she is also a person who has taught me that surrender of the ego can lie happily by the side of realisation of the self. And that the realisation of self – so prized in our time – is predicated on the deepest respect for the reality of others. This aspect of Iris's character is at its most moving in the grave sweetness with which she listens to children, the wholly genuine attention she gives to their comments and the care with which she answers their questions. This profound gracefulness towards other people is, I think, one of the reasons why she is – though I know she dislikes it – so often described as good.

In an extract from his book on Iris (the New Yorker excerpt alone is one of literature's great word portraits of a writer's life and of long, long love) John Bayley has written that . . ."The voyage is over, under the dark cloud of Alzheimer's she has arrived somewhere".

He was wise and right.

Iris's voyage has been magnificent. The islands she discovered and mapped out for us are deeply precious in that within their sanctuary we can know ourselves better.

Josephine Hart,
London, 1999.
O Iris Murdoch estate.

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The editors wish to thank the executors of Dame Iris's estate for providing this draft of a previously unpublished short article, which was written by Murdoch in 1967.

Notes on my relations with my characters.

When I have finished a novel I feel lonely and realise how very much the presence of one's characters seems like company, like family. One lives constantly with them, even when doing things other than writing - one hears their voices, one hears their often unexpected witticisms - one sees them constantly in the mind's eye. Then suddenly the novel is finished and this company is gone - it is as if they had emigrated -but after the novel is published one may hear news of them as if news of someone close is gone to Australia - but it's all remote and they are not with one anymore. Thus very occasionally in a ghostly way I hear a remark made by a character in a book finished long ago - sometimes it's rather a good remark too - one pulls oneself up with a jolt, realising the novel has been in print for years and the characters no longer in the process of creation.

One of the nice and often eerie things about making a play out of a past and done with novel is

this re-meeting with a vanished character - the character begins to talk again - and may even have changed or developed in the interval. This is interesting - and the theatre certainly tends to show one things about the novel which one may not have noticed before - it may certainly show up its faults of structure, of characterisation. A weakness of structure which in the novel is covered over by some sort of magic of talk or mood appears clearly and cannot be ignored once one is looking at the novel from the point of view of the theatre. It is also very soon evident which are the nourished living characters and which ones are paste board. I have just been going through this interesting but in some ways painful showing up process in the case of *The Italian Girl* - a tale with an unfortunate structural weakness in the middle, with three good characters and three weak characters.

A work of art which deals with characters is perhaps a slightly odd kind of thing anyway. The character must be inside the work and must be on friendly terms with its form or structure - yet must not be cramped by the form - and it is the nature of real human beings to be chancy, accidental, unpredictable, and of course indefinable and endlessly detailed. So any work of art presents us with something less than a real human being and most works of art with something very much less. It is the work of a great artist - Shakespeare, Tolstoy - to give us the illusion of the presence of real people. When we reread a Shakespeare play we are often surprised to find how short it is! Can these few pages really have created Hamlet, Rosalind, Falstaff, Macbeth? The kind of criticism which involves discussion of the character outside the area of the play - the childhood of Lady Macbeth etc.- may be out of fashion nowadays, but it is understandable, for these do seem to be like real people.

Most writers, however, including me, don't pull it off. The form cramps the character who becomes thin and bloodless, or the character sprawls and wrecks the form [and] remains muddled and without vitality. This fight between character and form is I think something which all novelists and dramatists must know about. And in my own case it is always, alas, form that wins though I resolve almost every time to let the character wreck the form and see what happens. But every time the form is too strong and the characters are anaemic. I have sometimes thought it might be a good idea when the novel has reached the later planning stage, and story and characters exist in some detail, to abolish all the central characters who carry the story and let the peripheral minor characters convey the story instead and alter it in the process. I don't know whether this device would work - in fact I doubt if I would ever have the nerve to try it.

What goes wrong every time? Perhaps it's something to do with one's obsessions. Of course, the art business is geared to and powered by that mysterious thing, the unconscious mind. And the thing to do if you can is to use the power without being enslaved by it - when the power is absent, when the work of art is only the creation of the conscious intellect, we feel a lack – feel it sometimes confusedly and uneasily if the author is very good. (Parts of George Eliot, perhaps.) When the power is present it may take over the artist, then form and beauty tend to disappear and all we can see is obsession. This can of course be a good recipe for a best seller if you hit on the right obsession. The unconscious mind of the author speaks directly to the unconscious mind of the reader and both may enjoy themselves thoroughly. Ian Fleming, for instance. James Bond is a dream figure who satisfies his readers for the same very simple reasons that he satisfied his creator – and one must say that such works pre-eminently bear out Freud's diagnosis that art is simply a substitute for power, riches and the love of women. I think the artist always runs the danger of finding an illegitimate correlation in his work. He can let his sexual fantasises rip, he can indulge his obsessions, he can humiliate some characters and indulge others. And in a bad writer or a middling writer you can usually spot which characters the author identifies himself with and which he is entirely external to. In fact I never dislike any of my characters, not a single one, and am on the whole far too indulgent to them, even the minor and external ones. I ought to be much tougher with them. In the novel I am writing at the moment there is a character I have become so fond of that I feel I can refuse him nothing however implausible his success may make the tale. All this sort of thing is dangerous. One needs passion but not obsession. What are Shakespeare's obsessions, what are his fantasies, which characters just are Shakespeare? We don't know. (Though we can when we read Hamlet and the Sonnets make one or two rather shaky guesses.) He manages to be inside all of them and yet to leave them all outside himself and separate from each other. Tolstoy can do this too. And so many people! Whereas we lesser folk can merely

produce and reproduce a sort of gluey stuff, glazed over by fantasy within which a small range of people, often the same over, are compulsively joined together in some sort of obsessional and half unconscious pattern. The half unconscious doesn't matter. Think how fast Shakespeare must have written – but the obsessional does in novels and plays. So there it is – the creation of character is, as I see it, the really important thing. Form is important, too, but it should never be a menace to character. Consider - and any really serious and ambitious writer ought to do just this over and over again – consider Shakespeare, who manages to join mysterious, wonderful shining form to powerful, free infinitely various character, how he joins love to justice in his view of his people. One must try to be able to do that. Imagination is the ability to join truth to form, the overcoming of obsession and fantasy; it is the great liberator and the great truth teller. And, oh, how very difficult the whole business is.

O Iris Murdoch estate, 1967

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Review: *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* by John Bayley. (Duckworth: London, 1998. 192pp £16.95.)

In *An Accidental Man,* the authorial voice remarks that "all truly bereaved people are possessed" by the soul of the departed. John Bayley was first bereaved when his wife became a victim of Alzheimer's disease and again when she died on February 8th. When writing this beautiful book of memories, Bayley can be said to have been possessed by his wife's soul in the sense that some of her novels anticipate what he would later write about their relationship and their life together. He states that he had tried to make *The Red Hat* sound a bit like something in his wife's novels, as though he were "trying to remind or inspire or even carry on the torch by a kind of imitation".

John Bayley's book is divided into two parts, "Then" and "Now". "Then" Iris was the scruffy young don who became one of this country's leading novelists. "Now" describes the years when he was "chained to a corpse". He begins with a description of how things were "in those days". People drank Hock and cinemas were cinemas. As for Gerard in *The Book and the Brotherhood,* those days are "irrevocable and beyond mending and far away". Some things are apparently unchanged. For example, they still enjoy swimming. One day soon after they had first met, abandoning their bicycles, they crept through a hole in a hedge and slipped down into the river. Forty-five years later Bayley describes how, after swerving abruptly out of the mainstream traffic and parking their car, they slipped through the hedge and down into the Thames. As ever Iris loved being in the water but panic took hold of both of them when he found himself involuntarily unable to help her out. She risked forgetting how to swim and letting herself drown, opening her mouth in a soundless appeal. John Bayley realised that they would never be able to bathe there again. The death of Titus in *The Sea, The Sea,* and possibly the death of Betty in *An Accidental Man*, remind us that even good swimmers can drown. Bayley affirms that, before she became ill, Iris had twice risked drowning. He describes how, when they were swimming with their friend, the artist, Reynolds Stone, off Chesil Bank in Dorset, Iris had, at a certain point, missed the pulse of the wave that should have carried her back on to the shingle and, had she not kept her mouth shut, would have drowned in a few seconds. I ask myself whether Iris Murdoch would not have preferred a more rapid death by drowning rather than the slow horror of Alzheimer's. In *The Sea, The Sea,* the narrative voice speaks of the sea as "the very image of restful death,". and in *The Good Apprentice,* to fall into the ocean is to fall into the hands of God, according to Thomas McCaskerville.

In his book *Byron in Italy,* Peter Quennell comments that Shelley was always obsessed by the twin images of sea and death. Although Shelley was a non-swimmer and Iris swam well, water and death are binary images in many of her novels. In *An Accidental Man,* when one of the characters informs her husband that they have been invited on a yachting holiday in the Mediterranean, his immediate rejoinder is that they will drown. In the same novel Austin dreams of a place where there are "cool meadows and flowers and healing waters". He seems to be describing the place where Iris and John Bayley had first

made love. In *The Sea, The Sea*, the narrative voice describes a suburban landscape [as], "as lovely and significant" to the couple as the Garden of Eden. Charles and Hartley "fled on bicycles to lie in buttercup fields, beside railway bridges, near canals, in waste land awaiting housing estates," just as the young Iris Murdoch and John Bayley had done. Charles describes himself as "a green, awkward, graceless boy," commenting on how miraculous it had seemed when an older woman became his lover. Unlike the husbands of other famous writers such as Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield, John Bayley is disarmingly modest. Iris was "a superior being" whereas he was "naturally indolent" and merely "one of the more promising young ones in the English School".

When John Bayley describes the last years of Iris Murdoch's life, we remember how, in a very different context, Charles Arrowby, who has kept Hartley prisoner in his house by the sea, dresses her as though she were a child. John Bayley is obliged to wash and dress his wife. He asks himself what she would do if he died or if he became ill and had to go to hospital. Before she became ill they had never bothered to buy a television set: now they regularly watch a children's programme called the Teletubbies, featuring a world "peopled with real rabbits, real sky, real grass," the world she had so often described in her novels. In *The Sea, The Sea*, James collects "oddly shaped stones, sticks, shells, even bits of wood carved with crude faces, large teeth and even bones. . . ". In *The Green Knight* Moy collects stones with which she communes. John Bayley describes how in former days his wife had collected stones which were for her "Platonic objects, living in some absolute world of forms". As a sufferer from Alzheimer's she would bring home "twigs and pebbles, bits of dirt, scraps of silver foil, even dead worms rescued form the pavement on our short walks".

Charles Arrowby comments that "real love is like a marriage when the glamour is gone". There was no glamour in the last years of John Bayley's marriage. Between him and his wife hangs "the awful doom-ridden tension that exists between the healthy and the sick". In Bayley's *Characters of Love* he writes about lovers in Chaucer, Shakespeare and Henry James, but he and Iris , too, are "characters of love". Shakespeare anticipated their relationship when he wrote "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds". Bayley's book hides nothing of the horrors undergone by those suffering from Alzheimer's disease or by those who love them. Charles Arrowby wrote of the suffering endured by himself and Clement, [and] said that "shared pain was so much less than the torment of her vanishing, the terrible lived time of her eternal absence". In *An Accidental Man* the authorial voice comments that one of the most important lessons is that art can console. I trust that this is true for John Bayley, particularly [of] his own art and hers.

Professor Madeline Merlini,
London, 1999.

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Critical Reception in England of *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* by John Bayley.

When extracts from John Bayley's memoirs of Iris Murdoch appeared in the *New Yorker* and the *Times*, and the *Memoirs* themselves were published shortly afterwards, critical response was polarized. Feelings were roused because Bayley had chosen to speak in intimate and painful detail of Iris Murdoch's progressive degeneration from Alzheimer's Disease. Praise came immediately, however, from the Alzheimer's Disease Society, which thought the publicity valuable in drawing public attention to the plight of the 750,000 sufferers in the UK alone, and to their carers. The book was also extremely well received by the majority of critics, and reviews which appeared in *The Telegraph*, *The Lancet*, and *The Evening Standard* were acclamatory. Katie Campbell, writing in *The Evening Standard*, declared this to be "quite simply one of the most moving and gripping love letters ever written". A few critics, however, were quick to judge the book more harshly in the light of the of the "confessional" writing that has enjoyed publicity in recent years (Ruth Picardie's *Before I Say Goodbye* and John Diamond's *C: Because Cowards Get Cancer*" as examples). Criticism of this genre had been generated on the grounds that such revelatory

writing produces an uncomfortable intimacy, and is voyeuristic. As far as Bayley's *Memoirs* were concerned, the moral tension was heightened because Murdoch herself was not well enough to consent to such intimate revelations, and some critics felt the detail to be painful for those who loved and admired her. John Bayley himself responded by stating that his wife was neither diminished or degraded by her disease, and that, generally, he wanted to destigmatize Alzheimer's. When Harriet Swain, in an interview for the *Times Higher,* asked him *why* he had decided to reveal the intimate details of his wife's illness, he confessed that it was "because it was a very sad situation: and because Alzheimer's is a condition that isn't known much about". He thought that Iris would approve because he had "hoped to show something of what it means to be good".

Carol Sarler's polemic in the *Observer* ("In the name of love, shut-up") was the most punishing, and vitriolic. She claimed to be repelled by Bayley's "boasting" about his marriage as "one of the century's great love affairs". And while he claimed to be offering a celebration, Sarler accused him of actually "demeaning, diminishing, reducing and insulting [Murdoch] to the point of common assault". She suggested that the impetus for such treatment was that Iris Murdoch was a hugely achieving woman with a less achieving man in her life. Sarler was herself rebuked by readers who wrote in over the following weeks.

On the other hand, among the many critics who applauded Bayley's decision to speak and were impressed by the quality of his writing, was Jackie Wullschlager of the *Financial Times,* who heralded the book as a "masterpiece". The intimacy of detail, for her, was "at once hilarious and poignant, making a tender absurdity of life and death," and she claims further legitimacy for the memoirs on the grounds that they shed light on Murdoch's novels. (Bayley suggests that past lovers appear in the guises of Mischa Fox, Lucas Graffe, and Carel Fisher: "writing about them got them out of her system and finally, in a sense, out of her novels too"). The description of his wife's consolation from watching the Teletubbies, which other critics found demeaning, Wullschlager finds "comically other worldly – part of a lifetime's droll acceptance of the quirkiness of humanity". And Bel Mooney, writing in the *Daily Mail,* although she found the book at once "deeply moving" and "shocking," suggests that derisory criticism was merely a "knee jerk" reaction, and argues that the book "increases the store of human understanding". The revelations are unique, she claims, yet universal: "[the book] contains anguish and acceptance, yet its message is one of truth and hope". Other critics, such as A.N. Wilson, took a less emotional, more literary standpoint, and suggested that Bayley's book provides a clue to the disparity between the "cool serenity" of Murdoch's philosophical writings and the tormented chaos of the lives she depicts in her novels.

Perhaps a more rational understanding of this book, and the marriage it portrays, lies in a refusal to sentimentalize either. In the marriage of Ben and Hartley Fitch in *The Sea, The Sea*, Murdoch depicts an enduring, terrible, yet necessary relationship. She knew that long-term loving marriages unavoidably involve tiresome over-familiarity, anger, and even hatred. Bayley demonstrates how love still thrives in such uncompromising familiarity, and read in this light, this book reveals itself as simply one brave enough to face such ambivalences, as well as the horror of dementia.

Anne Rowe,
Kingston University.

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Review: E.P Thompson, *Beyond the Frontier.* (Suffolk: Merlin Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. 111pp.)

At the outbreak of World War II, Frank Thompson, an Oxford undergraduate of immense promise, joined the Royal Artillery as a volunteer. In 1944 he was parachuted into Serbia with a Special Operations mission to aid the Bulgarian partisans against the occupying Royal Bulgarian army by organising airlifts and extending guerilla warfare into Bulgaria itself. When the commanding officer Major Mostyn Davies was killed, Thompson assumed command and entered Bulgaria with the partisans. Within a month all were

dead. After interrogation, torture and a show trial in the village of Litakovo, Frank, together with the surviving partisan leaders and some villagers who had given them bread, was shot. He was 23.

This book by his younger brother, the historian E.P.Thompson, is based on the Camp Lectures delivered at Stanford in 1981. It is both a brief memoir of Frank, and an attempt to establish the events of the last weeks of his life and the ideological context of the mission. It was politically sensitive, vulnerable at the time to conflicts of interest between the western and eastern allies and obscured since by suppression of documents, falsification and hearsay.

Frank met Iris Murdoch during his one year at New College. She was an undergraduate at Somerville and also reading Classics. They were "part of a small, intensely self-conscious, intensely intellectual group of friends, each of whom in series appeared to be in a state of unrequited, desperate passion for each other. Everyone seemed to have been in love with the wrong person". This could serve as a synopsis of most Murdoch novels and is the stuff of most undergraduate lives. But these personal dramas were played in and subject to a time of extraordinary political crisis. Frank, who corresponded with Iris for the rest of his life, wrote near the end of it: "I can honestly say I have never been in love. When I pined for you I was too young to know what I was doing – no offence meant". During that pre-war year they were immersed in the political as well as the personal. Iris converted Frank to Communism but "as the years of correspondence went on, the recruit seemed to become more committed to the cause, the recruiter less committed". During her work at the Treasury, Iris sounds envious of his experience: "I would volunteer for anything that would be certain to take me abroad. . . Sometimes I think it's quite bloody being a woman. So much of one's life has to consist of having an attitude".

Attitudes, at any rate, were largely shared. A friend reported that for Frank there was "no way to rightly grasp great [moral] questions except through poetry". Works of art grant epiphanies to Murdoch' s characters, though the author herself debates [the] value [of art] as well as affirming it. For both most of the poetry was classical. The Sicilian landings "provoked a host of associations" for Frank, including Pindar, Aeschylus and Virgil. He found the Greeks "very much the same as the Greeks who fought at Scamander or Marathon . . . or packed the slopes of the Acropolis to hear the Agamemnon". Many years later Iris wrote in Frank's memory a poem called "The Agamemnon Class, 1939," which inhabits the pre-war class at Oxford, the contemporary world of post-war students, the Trojan War and "the land of the past" where Frank remained.

Most of Murdoch's novels are set in the post-war world but war-time memories and metaphors often figure as moral searchlights, briefly illuminating a confusing scene of the personal, trivial and contingent. In 1939, Auden, whose lines "Fighters for no one's sake/ Who died beyond the border" inspired the title of this book, wrote "Those to whom evil is done, do evil in return": thus Julius, the Iago figure of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat,* proves to have spent the war suffering in Belsen. More generally, self-sacrifice in a "good" cause with no certainty of a "good" end is a haunting shadow of the idea of an absolute "Good". Matthew, in *An Accidental Man,* always remembers a passer-by joining demonstrators in Red Square to be arrested with them and discusses with Ludwig the meaning or pointlessness of such an action, the final question E.P. Thompson considers in this record of his brother. Frank must inform Iris's image of the man before the firing squad who in his last moments tries to fix his attention on the cause which brought him there. During his last Christmas he wrote to her: "all my waking hours should be devoted to one purpose only. . . nothing else matters. We must crush the Nazis and build our whole life anew. 'If we should meet again why then we'll smile'. If not, why then those who follow us will be able to smile far more happily and honestly in the world that we all helped to make". They did not meet again but surely Frank helped to make the world of Murdoch's novels as well as the post- Hitler world he died for.

Priscilla Martin,
St. Edmund Hall,
Oxford.

Review: *Patterned Aimlessness: Iris Murdoch's Novels of the 1970s and 1980s* by Barbara Stevens Heusel (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1995, xiii, 306pp).

While a dozen novels appeared between 1970 and 1989, this study refers most often to the following six: *An Accidental Man* (1971), *The Black Prince* (1973), *A Word Child* (1975), *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), and *The Message to the Planet* (1978). Anyone with a particular interest in any of these novels will find it worthwhile looking up what Barbara Stevens Heusel has to say. During the twenty years under discussion in this book, Iris Murdoch gave the Gifford Lectures in the University of Edinburgh (1982). The invitation to do so is, of course, always a recognition of the great esteem in which a thinker is held. The lectures are open to the general public and are well attended by members of the local academic community. It was years since Dame Iris had taught philosophy. At the time, her performance was regarded as a disappointment: the dwindling audience was puzzled by her diffident manner, often apparently improvised and disjointed exposition, and seeming lack of any direction. The book which eventually emerged, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), a "loose and baggy monster" by the conventions of contemporary analytical philosophy, is vastly richer and more coherent than the original set of lectures. However difficult it may be to state the relationship between her fiction and her philosophical writing – her novels are "not connected with philosophy," Heusel quotes her as insisting in a letter dated April 24th 1993 – there is no doubt that the reworking of the Gifford Lectures took place while she was also working on *The Philosopher's Pupil* and *The Message to the Planet.* In other words, two of the lengthiest, most complicated and substantial novels (even by her standards) were being composed simultaneously with a major philosophical text (by any standards): an astonishing feat of intellectual and imaginative power.

For philosophers, as such reviews as there have been in the professional journals show (except the utterly absorbing review-article by Stephen Mulhall in *Philosophy* 1997: pages 219-239), *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* is neither rigorously analytical enough nor comprehensive enough as regards postmodernism to play any significant part currently in either of the philosophical traditions that dominate Anglo-American universities. In fact, in the sense that she is a "Wittgensteinian neo-Platonist", as she described herself in the *Rencontres* with Jean-Louis Chevalier (1978), her place in the history of Anglo-American philosophy was secured by the essays collected in *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970). While obviously decades of further reading and reflection went into the Gifford Lectures, the fact is that there is little that is radically new in her stance towards other philosophers and towards our cultural predicament. It was with "Vision and Choice in Morality" (Aristotelian Society, Supplement 1956) that she broke new ground in moral philosophy – an epoch making debate with Ronald Hepburn, subsequently professor of philosophy in the University of Edinburgh (and surely a member of the committee which invited her to deliver the Gifford Lectures). Over against the dominant ethical theories of the time, prescriptivism (R.M.Hare), emotivism (A.J.Ayer) and so on, Murdoch - ingenuously? – insisted first on classifying them as no different essentially from the subjectivist voluntarism of the existentialism that she had studied in her book on Sartre (1953), thereby identifying the shared presuppositions of the then (and still) mutually hostile "Oxford" and "Continental" ways of doing philosophy; and secondly, against all such subjectivism, she sought to retrieve some sense of Plato's understanding of the moral life as ascetical obedience to the sovereignty of the form of the Good, the True and the Beautiful. In more technical terms, Murdoch (along with Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot, the formidable trio of young Oxford women philosophers), intervened in ethical debates on behalf of moral realism: realism in metaphysics (and not any form of idealism) as the only way of overcoming the fact/value dichotomy that prevails in so many domains of our culture – the belief that facts are what physics and natural sciences objectively and neutrally say, while values are what we conventionally or arbitrarily project in virtue of whatever feelings we have. (Platonism is, of course, realism, in this sense, since the ideas of the Good , the True and the Beautiful are regarded as really existing, imposing themselves on human beings, not our invention or projection). While plainly most academic theorists, let alone most people in our society, remain deeply attracted by emotivism in ethics and aesthetics ("What feels right to you..." etc., "No disputing about tastes". etc.), it is easy to see the debt that

many philosophers owe to Murdoch's early philosophical work. Raimond Gaita, for example, in *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (1991), a splendid book, is explicitly indebted to Murdoch (and Wittgenstein). Charles Taylor, one of the most discussed moral philosophers in the English Speaking world (he has just delivered the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh), frequently cited Murdoch, for example in *Sources of the Self* (1989), his major work.

Murdoch's importance as a moral philosopher is beyond dispute – unlike her status as a novelist! As Heusel notes, with a wry look at the famous remark in John Fowles's first novel *The Magus*, every new book has been reviewed as "genuinely first rate" or " as "ladies' magazine calibre". In fact, of course, it would be just as easy to dismiss Dickens and Henry James, and perhaps every other great novelist, as writing melodrama with soap opera plots. No such diversity over the value of her fiction could occur as regards Iris Murdoch's philosophical work. The handful of early letters and papers are indispensable reading today even as they mark an immensely significant shift in the history of ethics in modern times.

An associate professor of English Literature (at Northwest Missouri State University), Heusel comes to Murdoch as a reader of the fiction, obviously, rather than as a professional student of the philosophy. Earlier studies have related the fiction not so much to Murdoch's philosophical work as to some of the philosophers by whom she was attracted. Elizabeth Dipple (1982) and Peter Conradi (1986) have attended to her use of Plato's ideas in the novels, with Conradi also dwelling on the significance of Sartre's "romantic rationalism". Antonia Byatt (1965), as Heusel says, gave a brilliant account of Murdoch's interest in, and use of, some of Simone Weil's ideas. Heusel is the first to get to grips, at such length and particularly, with Murdoch's own distinctive philosophical position.

The two principal interlocutors in Heusel's account are Wittgenstein and Mikhail Bakhtin. She does not maintain, of course, that Murdoch had much – or indeed any – familiarity with Bakhtin's theories; rather "her comprehensive knowledge about language theory and her interest in the Russian worldview, Dostoevsky, and Shakespeare make it likely that she and Bakhtin at least absorbed similar knowledge about language and its theories" (*sic* page 275). Well, perhaps; but if Murdoch knew nothing about Bakhtin's work, or not enough to incorporate it into her fiction, there is no doubt that Heusel herself makes brilliant use of it in connection especially with *The Philosopher's Pupil*, *The Black Prince* and *The Message to the Planet*, bringing his well known notions of the polyphonic, the carnivalesque, and so on, to bear on how Murdoch's "most disorienting fiction" embodies the "accidental, idiosyncratic happenings of life". In a brief chapter on "Women's Discourse", invoking Bakhtin's theories, Heusel argues, against certain imaginable (but uncited) "feminist" objections to Murdoch, that, in *Nuns and Soldiers* and *The Message to the Planet*, "marginal women characters have become less marginalized in the later novels and ...the male thinkers have become marginalized" (page 140). Perhaps, again; though Heusel's reading of these two novels in this chapter seems to rely very little on anything that Bakhtin ever said, and though she is convincing about both of them, one wonders how central it really is that in Maisie Tether, in *The Message to the Planet*, Murdoch has "at last created a character with some of her own attributes" (page 154).

In the first three chapters of the book, and pervading the rest, Heusel is concerned to let us hear "Iris Murdoch's Wittgensteinian voice". The novels in which it is heard are *A Word Child*, *Nuns and Soldiers*, and *The Sea, The Sea*, (chapter 3). Some of Heusel's remarks about Wittgenstein are rather surprising. One of the "several cues" that Murdoch absorbed from him, in connection with these novels, came "particularly through his interest in Buddhism" – which taught her that "the paranormal and mysticism can be legitimate subjects" (page 31). True, Heusel alludes to Wittgenstein's early interest in Schopenhauer as well as Murdoch's own interest in Schopenhauer; but it seems unlikely that she needed inspiration from either source to regard the "paranormal and mysticism" as "legitimate subjects" to bring into her fiction. It seems likely, on the other hand, that Marcus Vallar in *The Message* owes something to stories about Wittgenstein, though even there she surely did not need the example of his unexpectedly enormous *Nachlass* to provide Marcus Vallar with a similar store of notebooks discovered after his death (page 33). Donald M. Mackinnon (M. not H.), as Murdoch is quoted as saying in a letter to Heusel dated 12th January 1983, was among her teachers at Oxford, and if the memory of those who knew them at the time may be relied on, his impact on her was very great – and all who knew him (I was taught by him at a

later stage) remember him with affection, as a larger-than-life paradigm of the *angst*- ridden and *distrait* polymath (page 27). Murdoch arrived in Cambridge just too late to attend Wittgenstein's lectures, though she was infected by the enthusiasm of some of his closest disciples and Heusel quotes the wonderful description that Murdoch gives of Wittgenstein in Ved Mehta's book *The Fly and the Fly Bottle* (1963). I hesitate to accept Heusel's suggestion that, when Frank Sheerwater, in *The Message*, is referred to as "scuttling like a small animal in the house", we should pick up an allusion perhaps to Wittgenstein's famous "beetle-in-a-box allegory" (page 280).

It is always a temptation to find allusions once it has been understood how deeply a writer may be indebted to another. More troubling, for a philosopher, is the reference to Wittgenstein's beetle at all, since Heusel immediately invites us to compare Beatrix Potter's "Sometimes a beetle lost its way in the passage", from *The Tale of Mrs Tittlemouse* (solemnly listed in the bibliography!). As it comes in Wittgenstein's *Investigations* (§ 293), the "allegory" is a joke, a *reducto ad absurdum*, in his lengthy argument against the idea that we know what pain, or any other sensation, *is* only from our own case. Imagine that we each have a box, he asks, with something in it that we call a "beetle"; no one can see into anyone else's box and everyone says that he knows what a beetle is only by looking into the beetle in his own box. Everyone might have something unique in his box, or something that changes all the time, or nothing at all. Thus we can ignore the intrinsically private object – thus Wittgenstein suggests, the idea that you can have a sensation or a thought that no one else could ever have completely collapses, and, with it, a good deal of philosophy about the "egocentric predicament" and the essentially incommunicable reality of the inner self (etc.). Heusel's detection of a possible allusion, that is to say, completely misses the point of Wittgenstein's attempt to release his readers from the idea that we are each locked up in our own world.

Murdoch's not infrequently repeated fear about the implications of Wittgenstein's later philosophy – "It is always a good question to ask of a philosopher: what is he afraid of?" as she used to say – was precisely that it ran the risk of playing down the inwardness of human life. Indeed, in the course of the same argument in his *Investigations*, he asks himself if he is not perhaps a disguised behaviourist. Murdoch comes back to this at some length in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* and it might perhaps be suggested that, if she has Wittgenstein's philosophy in mind in some of the novels, some of the characters whose interior lives seem so totally at odds with their public performances may be almost designed to test out, and even refute, the apparently behaviourist picture of the human being that his – or perhaps Gilbert Ryle's – persistent mockery of the allegedly "privileged access" that one enjoys to one' s own soul.

Heusel's readings of the most "Wittgensteinian" of the novels (chapter 3) in fact comes close to exploring and exploding any such behaviourist picture of the self. With the freedom that Murdoch gives, her major characters allow their own intensity to lead them into "chaotic vortexes" (page 50). Indeed, as she "relinquishes control on any Wittgensteinian characteristics" (such as she attributes to the mad philosophers in the books), it comes about that "such characteristics come from the depth of her own imagination" (page 57). The less she uses the legendary tales about Wittgenstein to embroider a character, the more deeply Murdoch gets to grips with the philosophy of the self with which his work wrestles. Paradoxically, at least for a reader versed in Wittgenstein's philosophy, many of the ways that Heusel finds Murdoch using his work seem quite external and superficial – while in her readings of scenes and characters in the novels Heusel, apparently unwittingly, uncovers, very lucidly and imaginatively, deep philosophical issues in Wittgenstein's work, as well as in Dame Iris's own philosophical essays, with which she engages, however obliquely and opaquely, in some at least of the novels.

Perhaps, one day, a philosopher will write a book about the relationship between Murdoch's philosophical works and her fiction. With *Patterned Aimlessness*, Barbara Stevens Heusel has greatly advanced our understanding of the relationship.

Fergus Kerr,
Blackfriars, Oxford, 1999.

The Iris Murdoch Society, Japan

On the 21st November, 1998, The Iris Murdoch Society of Japan was inaugurated. The society intends to facilitate research on Iris Murdoch's work and cultivate the exchange of ideas and information. A regular Newsletter is planned. The Japanese Society is presided over by Professor Yozo Muroya of Okayama University, who has published many works on Iris Murdoch in Japan, and has co-edited international editions of her poems and occasional essays. The first annual conference of Japanese Society was held in Okayama on Saturday 25th September 1999. Thirty-five members gathered for a day of discussion; several papers were read in Japanese, and Dr. Neil McEwan, of Nara Women's University, delivered a special guest lecture in English on "Iris Murdoch and Plato". The "parent" Iris Murdoch Society is delighted with the news that Japan has its own independent Society and the editors look forward to a long and productive link between the two societies. Inquiries about the Iris Murdoch Society of Japan should be sent to Professor Yozo Muroya, Faculty of Letters, 3-1-1- Tsushimanaka, Okayama 700, Japan. Telephone 086-251-8512.

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Review: *Poems by Iris Murdoch*, edited by Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Japan: University Education Press 1997 109pp), and *Occasional Essays by Iris Murdoch*, edited by Yozo Muroya and Paul Hullah (Japan: University Education Press 1998, 105pp).

Both these collections are printed in fine quality limited editions of 500 hardback copies. The collection of poetry contains 28 poems written over a period of 58 years. It has an introduction by the editors which is divided into two parts. The first comprises a biographical introduction written by Yozo Muroya, and the second comprises critical analyses of the poems by Paul Hullah. In attempting to clarify Murdoch's position regarding her poetry, Dr Hullah speculates that it may be a forum that allows a "direct and spontaneous response to the natural world," which is necessarily stifled by the "systematic musings" of philosophy. He suggests that although the delights to be found in Murdoch's poetry are very different from those to be found in her novels, they reveal much about the author's attitude towards poetry and its power, and much about the nature of poetic expression in general. Hullah's excellent perceptive critical analyses of the poems effectively illustrate this claim, and he ably points to the very best in them.

The poems are chronologically arranged into two groups: the juvenilia written before 1939, and mature pieces written after 1975. Hullah wisely takes pains to point out that Murdoch herself has never claimed to be a poet, nor had she made any strenuous effort to have any of her poems published. The early poems are, as Hullah points out, derivative and forged from second-hand inspiration. But there are, too, what he rightly calls some "original gems," even in the juvenilia, and some very accomplished poems in the later section, such as "John sees a stork at Zamorra," (1975) and "Agamemnon, Class 1939" (1977). But, perhaps, the best of these poems is to be found in the beauty of occasional individual images and in odd sharp moments of reflection, rather than looking for greatness in complete poems. The opening line of "Poem and Egg" announces that Murdoch would "like to write a poem like a picture," and Hullah suggests that here, she advocates "the sovereignty of the image, purely and simply expressed, allowed to speak volumes unfettered by argument or theory". Reading the poems in this light is more rewarding. For example, in "The Coming of April" Murdoch talks of how she "had seen /the little puppet hands of chestnut buds that flutter in the sun". And in "Oxford Lament" she remembers "the keenness of cutting edges/ on the fresh green ice of thought". And there is the occasional breathtaking evocation of atmosphere, as in "Fox," when as "my footstep creaks in grasses/ quietness makes me stare". But generally, these moments are relatively rare, and this collection, perhaps, has more sentimental than intellectual value for dedicatees of Murdoch's writing. Talking to Christopher Bigsby in a *Kaleidoscope* programme on BBC Radio 4 in 1995, Murdoch said that she had "written a few things which could be called poems but I think it is an almost impossible art, it's much more difficult than any of the other arts. . . . if you haven't got what the gods give then your waiting is in vain. . . I think that poetry is a wonderful thing, but very, very rare

and very special". Bigsby seized the opportunity to solicit more from Murdoch on the subject of her own poetry, and asked whether "it cuts closer to the quick, gets closer to some essence of you". But Murdoch simply laughed and said "no, I don't think so, I'm just trying to write a good poem". More poetry may yet be uncovered, but any enlargement of her poetic enterprise will surely have to be appreciated with a comparable acceptance of Murdoch's limitations in attempting a craft she was well aware was not suited to her talents. None the less, this collection has much to offer for those brief moments of magical awareness of the world that Murdoch is able to conjure with a clarity of perception that many a character in her novels, and many a reader of them, would pay fortunes to possess.

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The collection of Murdoch's occasional writing, also edited by Professor Muroya and Dr Hullah, comprises sixteen short articles which include five very early pieces originally written for the Badminton school magazine. There is a neo-Swiftian satirical piece on English perception of the Irish, written when Murdoch was a student at Oxford (a response by Denis Brooman is reprinted in an appendix). "A Woman Don's Delight" was written when Murdoch was teaching at St. Anne's College, Oxford, and a number of political articles which were published during the 1960s and 70s also appear (including "The Moral Decision on Homosexuality" which first appeared in *Men and Society* in 1964). Three letters to the *Times* are included, one which deals with women's education and another which deals with education policy generally. The third was written in righteous indignation at criticism of Frank Thompson, with whom Murdoch had been friends at Oxford, and who had been killed in the War. Dame Iris's address to Kingston University graduates, delivered at the Barbican in 1993 is reproduced, as are four interviews (two with Shena Mackay, one with Brian Appleyard and one with Sophie Lance). A few of Frank Thompson's notes to Iris Murdoch and a reprint of an original lino-cut by Murdoch herself complete this collection.

These essays are of interest because they reveal how the practical common sense that is a hallmark of Murdoch's mature moral philosophy is already manifest in the thinking of the sixteen year old schoolgirl. Even as a teenager, Murdoch had perceived the particular frailty in the human condition that she was to spend her adult years as a writer and philosopher attempting to remedy: "Man is a blind egotistical creature," she warns in an article on "Community Singing". Politically, almost prophetic worries about aggressive expansionism emerge, and impassioned concerns about the education of women and the introduction of comprehensive education are found in the letters to the *Times*. In "Morality and the Bomb" Murdoch undertakes a short but appropriate questioning of the relationship between morality and politics, and in the more famous "Moral Decision about Homosexuality" she demands love and tolerance for individual human difference. All her political opinions are vigorous and well informed, and her personal loyalties are unwavering: the sharp letter to the *Times* counteracts criticism of her late friend, Frank Thompson, by identifying him as "a brilliant, brave and good man".

The four interviews span the years from 1989 to 1994, and although not as challenging or revealing as other, more rigorous, published interviews, they provide more personal insights, often lost in interviews where Murdoch is less relaxed and more defensive. Three of these interviews are conducted in Murdoch's home, and one in The Pillars of Hercules, a pub in Soho. In "A Woman Don's Delight" Murdoch remembers her first gin and lime in the Royal Oak at Oxford (ordered by her companions because she did not know, then, what drinks were called), and the cover of this collection bears a watercolour of the Royal Oak itself. The picture lends a fitting, intimate touch to an affectionate book which sheds light on the personal and the inspirational aspects of Iris Murdoch's life and art, and allows a unique glimpse of the remarkable young person who shaped them.

Anne Rowe,
Kingston University.

(Readers wishing to check the availability of these volumes should contact Professor Muroya at Okayama University, Japan, directly. The address is given on page 15

Forthcoming

The next issue of *The Iris Murdoch Newsletter* will include:

Reviews of:

Iris and the Friends: A Year of Memories, by John Bayley, which was published in the UK by Duckworth on 12th August 1999;

"Something Special," a short story by Iris Murdoch published in hardback by Chatto and Windus in October 1999. "Something Special" is the only short story Iris Murdoch ever wrote for publication. It was previously published in Japan, and in a minor anthology called *Winter's Tales* (Macmillan, 1957).

Salvation by Art: The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch, by Anne Rowe, which will be published by the Edwin Mellen Press in 2000.

Iris Murdoch's Giffords: A study of the 1982 Gifford Lectures, edited by R.A Gillies which was published by St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews in 1995.

Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness, edited by Maria Antonaccio and Wiliam Schweiker, The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction, by Bran Nicol, published by St Martin's Press, London, 1999.

Articles:

A hitherto unpublished tribute of Dame Iris's to her friendship with Professor Philippa Foot.

An account by Peter Conradi of his and Phillipa Foot's visit to Litakovo in Bulgaria in 1999

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The Iris Murdoch Society

The Iris Murdoch Newsletter is the publication of the Iris Murdoch Society, formed at the Modern Language Association convention in New York City in December 1986. It appears annually, offering a forum for short articles and notices, and keeping members of the society informed of new publications, symposia and other news that has a bearing on Iris Murdoch and her writings.

1999 Meeting of the Iris Murdoch Society:

The 1999 meeting of the Iris Murdoch society was held on Friday February 25th, following the Murdoch session at the Twentieth Century Literature Conference, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky. Membership Chair, Darlene Mettler, reported on membership. The topic for the next Twentieth-Century Literature Conference panel will be "Iris Murdoch and the Carnivalesque".

Iris Murdoch Session: "City as Text : Iris Murdoch and London" was chaired by Barbara Stevens Heusel, Northwest Missouri State University, who read her paper, "City as Labyrinth in Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net* and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*" . The other presenters were: Christine W, Sizemore, Spelman College who read "At the Labyrinth's Center in Iris Murdoch's *The Green Knight*: Peter Mir as Wandering Jew, Minotaur, or Green Knight"; Darlene Mettler, Wesleyan College, who read "'The Best Place to Hide': London as Tutor in Iris Murdoch's *A Word Child* ", and Cheryl K. Bove, Ball State University, who read "The Image of London in Iris Murdoch's Novels.

Call for Papers: The Iris Murdoch Society will try to place a session at this conference yearly; anyone who is interested in presenting a paper or suggesting a topic for future Iris Murdoch panels should contact Barbara Stevens Heusel, Northwest Missouri State University, Department of English, 800 University Drive, Maryville, MO 64468-6001

If you would like to join the Iris Murdoch society and automatically receive the Newsletter please contact:

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Treasurer's Report:
The Star Financial Bank Balance as of September 30th 1000 was $10577.00 reflecting the following transactions:

1-31-98 Starting Balance	$ 936.98
Dues	537.50
Interest	32.50
Less Postage and Printing	450.00
Balance as of 9-30-99	$1057.00

The Iris Murdoch Society has a Balance of £ 364.65 in the Halifax Building Society, Kingston, Surrey, England.

Iris Murdoch News Letter

Ball State University, USA and Kingston University, UK Winter 2000 Number 14
ISSN 1528-4379

Iris Murdoch: A Memoir of Philippa Foot

In June 1942, Iris Murdoch appeared in the rooms at 2, Bradmore Road of her fellow-Somervillian and co-philosopher, Philippa Foot, bearing a bunch of wild flowers. Philippa was laid up in bed with abdominal TB, and their Philosophy tutor, Donald MacKinnon, had suggested Iris make this gesture. During 1993, a Festschrift for Professor Foot was being put together by Rosalind Hursthouse. Hursthouse solicited a contribution from Iris Murdoch, who assembled and lightly edited the entries that follow from her Journals, and wrote to Hursthouse as described below. Iris's account of their friendship, written in 1993, gives some of the atmosphere of the time, even though not all details are exact. It was, in the end, decided to publish the Festschrift without Iris Murdoch's contribution, which is accordingly published here for the first time. The editors wish to thank the executors of Dame Iris's estate for providing this draft.

[Name abbreviations in the following extracts are accounted for by Murdoch as follows: "E is Elizabeth Anscombe, M is Mary Midgley, Isobel is Somerville Ancient History tutor (my tutor); Mildred is Somerville Classical Mods tutor (my tutor). Freddie is Freddie Ayer".]

"We at once became close friends; I recall the joy with which I found her, so brilliant, so beautiful . . . A few days after our final exam I was already in the Treasury . . . We only learnt our school's results later. At the Treasury my pay was £290 a year - in effect £260, the rest being kindly kept for us til after hostilities! - and I imagine P[hillipa]'s pay [at Chatham House] was similar. Also our holidays, two weeks per annum. P lived in a flat in Soho, and I in a small but romantic flat just over the underground railway off Victoria Street. When P was bombed out she came to live with me . . . One of our precious 2 weeks holiday P and I spent with her parents in Yorkshire, Redcar, where her father owned a steel factory. Her mother was American, daughter of President Cleveland and born in the White House. The house where P and her sister Marion grew up was/is a very magnificent one. Both P and Marion loved ponies and had governesses. Travel during the war was far from comfortable ('Is your journey really necessary?' written up everywhere.) P & I had decided to take our bicycles when the precious time came, but had to abandon them at Kings Cross, having failed to get into one *packed* train and only, just, separated, got a footing on the next. We could not find each other again even at Darlington where we had to change. We eventually reached the station at Redcar and found each other. The bicycles miraculously turned up the next day. Everyone was so honest during the war. Our London flat did not avoid bombs (which were everywhere), the windows & window frames were blown in (waking us up at 7 am which we regarded as funny) and were then filled in by quickly supplied wood, produced by kindly busy carpenters. We walked to our offices over piles of debris which had not been there the day before.

We were parted when the war ended. I had before that decided to leave the Treasury to join UNRRA and I left England 3 days[1] after the end of European hostilities & went on to Austria and the Displaced Persons camps. I returned late in 1946 [and went] to Cambridge answering an offer of a D.Phil place in philosophy. I think this cutting was sent me by P. I spent a year in Cambridge then moved to a fellowship in Oxford. (This also sent me by P). Then, so happily, we were both Oxford philosophers! . . . I have always loved and revered Philippa, a wonderful life-long best friend, understanding each other . . . Her support during that time, and later, ever after, has been magnificent and deep."

February 6th 1946

"Remembering my conversation with Pip about time. Time actual which is 'left over' after all other exploration is made. Kant on time, Marcel on time. What "escapes from time" and how? The deductive system? Is time – bound, in sense of having been invented at a particular

[1] In fact 3 months

moment and depending for continued 'existence' on our continued assent to certain conventions. In what sense does it exist? Because it is thought about by particular people? Are its truths 'timeless'. A verification containing them does not take account of time - nor do we think these events in future time will invalidate them - though they may become useless or go out of fashion."

March 17th 1946
"Talk with Pippa about her conversation with Elizabeth about the cogito. The cogito as a proof which one can 'only do for oneself'. 'Now you do it'. Example of the man who comes up to me in a dream and says cogito ergo sum. (To which I reply, 'oh, no you don't pal!') Example: a room with chairs and tables in but I can only talk in world outside where there are no chairs and tables. Is the cogito essentially more 'incommunicable' than any other proof?"

July 26th 1947
"This morning with Philippa. Subjectivity and objectivity in morals. Relate Kant's noumenal self to present-day metaphysical backgrounds. Moral act as creative – Marcel, Berdyaev. This is a good man, or a good act. What kind of 'is'? Pure and practical reason must somehow be one. (Isobel: 'Freddie has discovered Kant'.) Distinguish transcendental and transcendent metaphysics. Heidegger (e.g.) is transcendental in method – but because of view of 'authenticity' implies a transcendent reality. Kant right that it is the fact of the moral law that first sets the problem to speculative Reason."

August 4th 1947 (I in Cambridge [part of] letter to Pippa:)
"(About Berdyaev's Eschatological Metaphysics). What he says about Kant makes some sense to me, but the development via Böhme's Ungrund etc. seems to lead into a quite different atmosphere. A description (of private personal exp.) or an appeal to conquer an exposition – so much of this stuff one recognises – certain rather symbolical descriptions ring a bell but what is one really up to? As you say – maybe one kind of symbolism just 'suits' some people – and since one is always wanting frames and concepts for one's obscure experiences one says 'that's it'".

October 17th 1947
"Devastated by a conversation with Elizabeth in which there was Q[uestion] of seeing Wittgenstein! A talk yesterday with Pippa, fell into two parts. Kant as link with existentialist moral philosophy. K[ant]'s morals – main point is the recognition of the uncompromising demand 'seen in a way' by reason. Trans. unity or apperception. Noumenal self - the inexplicable and ineffable is in Kant, too. Objective and subjective in K[ant]. (See Berdyaev). Via crit – or Judgement? K[ant] takes idea of law as one link between ... and prac[tical] reason. But – wrong - practical reason isn't like that. But is reason?"

June 12th 1948
"I talk philosophy with E. and P, and psychology with Mary. Argument with E. about Kant and Wittgenstein. I talked with P about Kant. She was saying that K[ant] showed necessary connections impossible in exp[erience] in time. (Paradox – solving Hume's problem.) Nec[essary] connections alright for conceptual system – but when seeking empirical laws etc. we can only us[e] it as an Idea of Reason. Analytic at odds with Dialectic. In Maths and Newtonian physics as system necessity rules – but in world...".

February 26th 1949
"On Tuesday at Mildred's, argument [-] me and Pippa versus E. about opaqueness of novel characters. E. praised some remarks of Proust about the novelist rendering transparent that

which was opaque in ordinary life – regarded [François] Mauriac's 'respect' for his characters as sentimental.[2] P. annoyed. A typical disagreement".

September 18th 1949
"Argument with Pip and Mary about naming feelings. M. said, case of the indefinite colour. I said at least one could look at the colour. Pip said she had a queer feeling which she named Herbert. Not of course a log[ical] proper name – H. has certain characteristics otherwise couldn't be .... What is it to be Herbert again? Exp[ect] it's an Idea of Reason. P. reaches here by being bored with categories and reflecting on appearance (things in themselves, difference – every event has a cause etc)". [Note in margin by Murdoch "This unclear in MS"]

March 1st 1951
"E's lecture this morning. P. said: Aren't three things being confused? The difference between 'just doing it' (e.g. getting up in the morning, putting one foot before another) and doing it in accordance with a rule. The difference between a finite and an infinite series".

May 30th 1954
"A long philosophical talk with Philippa before lunch".

© Iris Murdoch estate.

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Return to Bulgaria, October 1999

In 1989, *The Mail on Sunday* published a surprising article by Sue Summers entitled, "The Lost Loves of Iris Murdoch". Summers, who may have been alerted by Iris's old friend, the publisher Dan Davin, told two stories. One concerned Franz Steiner, the Czech Jewish refugee, anthropologist and poet, who died in 1952. The other, Frank Thompson, who died in 1944. Iris was quoted as saying that Frank and she would have married, had he lived. Whether she actually said this is a moot point. The article erroneously states that she and Franz lived together for three years before his death. Since she knew Franz for one year only, and they emphatically never lived together, this inaccuracy casts doubt on other claims. However, in 1996 Iris repeated to me her belief that she and Frank, whom she recalled as burly and laughing a good deal, would have married: "we adored one another'". Summers was right about the iconic significance of both men, and Iris clearly believed she and Frank were informally engaged.

2

Frank Thompson was brilliant, tall, slim, fair-haired, grey-blue eyed, high cheek-boned, a gifted poet, an intense idealist dedicated to stopping Hitler, and a Wykhamist who spoke six languages and later acquired three more. He was one year younger than Iris, reading Mods at New College. He came from a liberal, anti-imperialist and well-connected bohemian family that was also hospitable, "quick with ideas and poetry and international visitors"; his younger brother E. P. Thompson was to make his mark as the best-known left-wing historian and activist of his generation. Boyhood friends of both had fought and died with the International Brigade in Spain. The first time Iris saw Frank, he was very drunk and lying flat on his back in the entrance hall of the Union with his head inside the telephone-box. His was a *nature riche*. It was almost certainly at that same November meeting at Queens College, that a friend pointed Frank out to Iris. "There's Frank Thompson.... We must get him into the Party." "And so," Iris remembered, "we did.... He was, I think, the most remarkable person that I met as an undergraduate at Oxford". Their meeting happened on March 6th 1939, after a play about Fascism in Britain, *It Could Happen Here*.

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[2] François Mauriac [1885-1970] French writer, biographer, novelist.

Frank, wanting to make a good impression despite being pretty drunk, started on politics. He had left the Liberal Club the week before because it was "too frivolous". He had no use for the Labour leaders either. Iris asked provocatively, "What about the Communist Party?" Frank said, "Come to tea in a couple of days and convert me". He wrote to a friend –"I've met my dream-girl - a poetic Irish Communist who's doing Honours Mods. I worship her". He joined up that September, was posted abroad in March 1941, and joined the dangerous Special Operations Executive in September 1943. During his last three years, Iris and he corresponded, and from their correspondence and other evidence, it is clear that she came to love him. Before long, he parachuted into Macedonia to aid the Partisans and, in an ill-fated exercise, movingly described in his brother E.P.Thompson's *Beyond the Frontier*, was captured in May 1944 and executed.

Raina Sharova, who claimed to have been an eyewitness, gave a theatrical, oft-repeated account of the last days. Frank may have been tortured. His claims for protection as a P.O.W. under the Geneva Convention were ignored. He revealed nothing. During his imprisonment he was calm and observant despite a fever. After an old peasant woman spoke up bravely in his defence, Frank and his companions were given bread and onions to eat. On January 18th he had written that even the death of a democrat is in a sense creative. "One or ten or a hundred new democrats are created by his example". The villagers could not be persuaded to enact the lynching the authorities required, and during a staged trial, he much impressed his hearers by calmly smoking his pipe while leaning against a pillar, dismissing the interpreter and answering questions in idiomatic Bulgarian. Frank avowed Communism at this trial. Found guilty around the 7th June, when the Second Front that he so longed for was finally opening in Normandy, he was taken with his men and four other officers for execution.

Major Thompson took charge of the condemned men and led them to the castle. As they marched off before the assembled people, he raised a clenched fist, the salute of the Fatherland Front which the Allies were helping. A gendarme struck his arm down, but Thompson called out to the people, "I give you the Salute of Freedom!" All the men died raising this salute. The spectators were sobbing, many present declared the scene was one of the most moving in all Bulgarian history, that the men's amazing courage was the work of the English Officer who carried their spirits, as well as his own.

They were hurriedly buried in an unmarked grave. A volume of Catullus was found in Frank Thompson's pocket, and a Byzantine coin, sewn into his tunic, was kept by a collaborator. These, in time, were returned to Iris.

3

In the autumn of 1943, Philippa Bosanquet moved from Oxford to work at Chatham House in St James's Square in London, an economics research assistant working on the prospects for post-war European economic reconstruction. Soon she moved in full-time with Iris, and stayed there until spring 1945. On 27th September 1944, a "Missing, Believed Killed" notice appeared in the *Times*. More than a week later, Philippa was alerted at work and, on her return to the flat, finding Iris in the kitchen, broke the news. The authorised, pious version - the show-trial, the avowal of Communism, Frank dying with Botev's "Song of Freedom" on his lips - gave a legitimising heroic ancestry for the new regime. Iris never had reason to disbelieve it. It was repeated in *Beyond the Frontier* in 1997.

Robert Conquest had been at Winchester college with Frank, and in the Oxford CP like both Frank and Iris, before becoming the pioneer British historian of the iniquities of the USSR. From 1944-7 he found himself press attaché to the Allied Control Commission in Bulgaria, and suggested to Topencharov, then Director of Press, that something be done to honour Frank which would redound to the credit of the Bulgarian CP image, as well as to that of the British. Frank's official reburial was in 1947, with his mother and brother present. Though Conquest did not know, or know of, Sharova, he wrote to me that he was "sure the trial story was a later invention" and believed that at most a "drum-head" trial without speeches might have occurred. Conquest discovered that the last letters of Bulgarian partisans, generally

apologising for troubles they had brought upon their parents, were often doctored as Party declarations instead. In just this way, too, was Frank's end dressed up.

It was both moving and fitting to find myself travelling to Bulgaria with Philippa Foot for one week in the autumn of 1999 where, among other things, we hoped to research the circumstances of Frank's last days and of his death. We did not dream that we might meet an eyewitness to his murder. A kindergarten in central Sofia is named after him; and a station one hour out also bears his name and has a bas-relief of Frank smoking his pipe – another consequence of Conquest's moves. We met Frank's Partisan General, Slavko Trunski, on October 3rd, in his flat in central Sofia. Trunski was visibly moved to recall Frank, about whom he had written two books (one, *Grateful Bulgaria*, available in English). He recalled Frank as exceptional, and that he had never had so close a friendship with a non-Bulgarian. But he went on to state that "there was definitely no trial.... They were in a hurry to kill him". "We don't even know if Sharova was there," he said, something later confirmed by Sharova's daughter. We were confused that *Grateful Bulgaria* itself recycled the story of the trial but later learnt that Trunski had been gaoled for 386 days and tortured around 1951 as an "English spy": he had no defence against government propaganda. This may account for his use of Sharova, to whom he gave no credence. Fourteen days later, on his 86th birthday, Trunski died.

4

Frank died and is buried at Litakovo. We were expected there. Philippa's kind friend in the philosophy department at Sofia University, Maria Pantaleev, had spent an afternoon before our arrival driving to Litakovo and befriending the mayor, Todorka Kotseva. She received us, together with Svetana Toderova, the pro-Gymnasium headmistress, official guide to the monument and the events of 1944, who was familiar with evidence collected from all villagers for a 1986 exhibition. They, and three others, carried flowers to put on Frank's grave. They showed us a hand-carved pipe he is believed to have smoked.

Some of the official story - the bread and onions, and also Frank's courage - was true. But now, after the fall of Communism, Litakovo villagers say emphatically that there was no "trial" of any kind, merely brutal interrogation. Litakovo was a killing-ground for Partisans, whence none survived - those who had offered them food or shelter were treated with "exceptional cruelty" - the atmosphere terrifying, uncontrolled and wild. The villagers had witnessed bodies, some decomposing, dragged into the village behind carts for weeks, and also been forced to witness executions, and then walk, or even dance the Hora to a band playing around the bodies to show disrespect. Some victims were beaten to death in the public square. Sashka Razgradlian, a nineteen-year old Jewish Partisan from Sofia was, in late May 1944, raped, forced to dig her own grave, and buried alive.

We were told that an eyewitness to the execution wished to talk to us, who would be late owing to his negotiating the division of collective land. It is good that we waited. Naku Staminov was in his late 60s, and in 1944 had been12 years old. He was stout, and, as he reminisced, a tic reappeared in his right eye from the time of his childhood terror. His parents' house fronted the square. He followed a group of about twelve Partisans including Frank, the tallest and handsomest and strongest, who was chewing something. Later Staminov learned they had been lied to when they had been told they were going to another village. Frank wore a green zippered-jacket, and Naku later recognised his picture in the newspaper as that of the foreigner whose murder he unexpectedly watched. They were surrounded by Gendarmerie but seemed calm. There was complete silence. They were shot in a ditch. Frank half-turned, shouting something furiously in English before being raked with fire across the shoulders. The bodies were then injected - presumably with poison - to ensure that there had been no mistake. Frank was the last to stop convulsing. A ring was cut off his finger with a knife. Naku was sick with terror for months afterwards. The gendarmerie threatened him with their guns before he fled. He thought normal life could never begin again.

After our return, relatives of Frank's biographer, Simon Kusseff, uncovered the report of the Allied Control Commission's official inquiry. It, too, corroborates Staminov. Frank was shot

on the orders of Capt. Stoianov who was in turn tried and condemned for exceeding his authority, illegally ordering subordinates to shoot Thompson without due sentence. Stoianov was summarily executed on 11th September, 1944 in Litakovo, one month before Philippa had brought Iris the news of Frank's death. Six subordinates were tried by the Novoselski and Botevgradski People's courts, sentenced to death and executed: Georgi Manov; Dicho Dichev; Boris Tomov for their role in the interrogation, Stoian Lazarov, Angel Stanchev, Ilia Tupankov for their role in the execution. Only Ilia Tupankov admitted his guilt. Manov and Tupankov both claimed that Stoianov had confessed that he himself shot Thompson. We listened spellbound to Naku Staminov's eyewitness account of Frank's execution. No one expected this murder. They were astonished. All believed that Frank's name will live on. We stood in silence by Frank's grave. I left a red carnation, which Philippa gave me, as from Iris.

© Peter Conradi, July 2000

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Iris Murdoch's Style of Philosophical Argument

One mark of good philosophers is that they engage imaginatively and constructively with alternative or opposed views to their own. Often, it is true, philosophical work, though at its best always a form of dialectic, turns into aggressive logic-chopping and point-scoring, which usually fails to change anyone's position. The only way to change, or even seriously challenge, someone else's supposedly wrong-headed view, in philosophy, is to enter with as much sympathy as one can muster into its alleged attractions. You have to feel the spell before you can break its hold. One of the most marvellous remarks that Iris Murdoch ever made goes as follows: "It is always a significant question to ask about any philosopher: what is he afraid of?" (in "On God and Good", 1969, reprinted in *The Sovereignty of Good*, 1970, page 72).

Even Socrates, perhaps the first philosopher, at any rate the original practitioner of dialectical method in Plato's earlier dialogues, often seems out to browbeat and humiliate his interlocutors rather than to refute them on the basis of really understanding from inside why they are tempted to hold the views that they do.

Iris Murdoch is often quite reserved and even wary in her allusions to the impact of the later Wittgenstein's work on herself or on philosophy at large. In the Gifford Lectures, for example, while she values the "liberating anti-Cartesian aspects" of his Philosophical Investigations, she worries that - with a slogan like "An 'inner process' stands in need of outer criteria" (Investigations I, §580) - he may be "forcing upon us a certain picture of experience as a kind of illusion, thereby discrediting the density and real existence of inner thinking". In other words, she fears that the direction of his anti-Cartesianism may be to confirm the programmatic suspicions of inwardness that she finds operative quite blatantly in Gilbert Ryle's once highly influential book *The Concept of Mind* (1949). For that matter, Wittgenstein himself worried about pushing his anti-Cartesianism to the other extreme, asking himself on one occasion, in the middle of his most famous argument: "Are you really a behaviourist in disguise?" (§307). It is not surprising that her "Shakespearean" sense of "character", so wonderfully displayed in the novels, should prompt Murdoch as a philosopher to fear a tendency in Wittgenstein's later work to insist so strongly on the misguidedness of the classical empiricist picture of the mind as a "theatre" to which we have privileged access, that we are misled into regarding everything except our visible measurable behaviour as a fiction (cf. §307). (See *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, pages 270-91).

What Iris Murdoch seems to have learnt from her brief time of study in Cambridge - prior of course to the publication of any of [Wittgenstein's] later writings - was to practise his way of doing philosophy: specifically, by developing methods that allow us to get to the roots of the fascination of the temptingly misguided views. "I trot out all the problems that education represses without solving", Wittgenstein once wrote (*Philosophical Grammar*, written in 1932-34 but not published in English until 1974): "I say to those repressed doubts: you are quite

correct, go on asking, demand clarification". This "Freudian" approach, as he calls it himself, clearly appealed to Murdoch - most obviously, perhaps, in her finely developed example of the mother who feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, one of the great passages in modern moral philosophy, elaborated precisely in connection with considerations about the "inner life" (in "The idea of perfection", 1964, reprinted in *The Sovereignty of Good*, pages 1-45). Here, as Murdoch says, "is one of those exasperating moments in philosophy when one seems to be relentlessly prevented from saying something which one is irresistibly impelled to say" – "And of course", she goes on to say, "as Wittgenstein pointed out, the fact that one is irresistibly impelled to say it need not mean that anything else is the case" (page 21).

In fact it would be difficult to find a published text in which Wittgenstein says exactly that - Murdoch supplies no reference. But these remarks, and others in the same vein, about his approach - seeking to bring out these irresistible and yet complacently deniable thoughts and inclinations -, show how much she has learned from him, or how congenial and illuminating she found what she heard.

Iris Murdoch had been teaching for some years and had already brought out her book on Sartre - *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953) - but it was with her paper "Vision and Choice in Morality", first published in the supplementary volume for 1956 of the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, that she first made her mark as a philosopher in the public arena of British philosophy. In retrospect, as has long been acknowledged, it is a landmark in twentieth-century moral philosophy.

In the Sartre book already, and in "Vision and Choice", though she will elaborate it later, in the essays collected in *The Sovereignty of Good*, Iris Murdoch outlines what she calls the "current view" in the moral philosophy which is only the articulation of widely and deeply held presuppositions in our culture about the moral life. At the time, most philosophers in Oxford dismissed Sartre and existentialist philosophy in general as "literature", rather than philosophy. It was disconcerting to encounter her insistence that the moral agent had much the same profile in linguistic analysis as in Continental existentialism.

Murdoch referred to Hume, Kant and Mill as the remote ancestors of the view, with its more immediate determinants being Ryle's behaviourism (Ryle's behaviourism; she holds back from ever saying Wittgenstein's, aware of his much greater complexity) and the view of meaning propagated by logical-positivist verificationism (A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*). On the view that she wants to expose and attack, to put it briefly and in the way that she often does, the moral life of the individual person is regarded as an episodic series of overt choices which punctuate his or her days. Ultimately, the "inner life" disappears in a behaviouristic view of moral agency, of the moral life construed behaviouristically "as strings of choices and recommendations backed up by reference to facts".

In her later work, but already in "Vision and Choice", Iris Murdoch determinedly exposes the fact/value dichotomy as the most pervasive and distorting philosophical myth in our culture - the assumption, explicated so eloquently in Ayer's book, that everything that we say may be divided up as either fact-stating or value-projecting. Obviously, at times, we make statements that are purely factual, and, at times, and no doubt much more frequently, we come out with utterances which are purely appreciative, emotive, etc. In everyday life it is quite common to try to separate "the facts" from "how the facts strike us". We often find ourselves, facing a set of facts, being affected in quite different ways: the purpose of a trial in a court of law is to enable the prosecution and the defence to put differing interpretations and evaluations on what all might agree are the bare facts of the case. The temptation, however, is to generalize - to assume that it is mere coincidence when our response to a situation is the same, and then, down the line, to deny that there are any facts of the case in the first place. Eventually, the temptation arises of treating the way the world is as always only the way it seems, or feels, to us in our culture, or even to me alone. The whole thrust of the Gifford Lectures is precisely that, without metaphysics we cannot have morals - without an understanding of the way things are, we cannot have a way of deciding how we are to conduct ourselves. In the end, Murdoch wants to deliver us from the grip of the assumption (first articulated by David Hulme) that we can never derive an "ought" from an "is" - that what

we "ought" to do or think can never be prompted or even commanded by what is the case. Against that morally paralyzing conception of the separability of fact and value, Murdoch insists on the need for us to return to a Platonic understanding of the identity and interchangeability of beauty, goodness, truth and reality.

Much has been written since Murdoch's early papers about her analysis of the deep affinities between the picture of the moral life in the Oxford and Continental ways of doing moral philosophy. While she did not turn to writing novels (as perhaps Sartre did?) as a way of "illustrating" or even of "exploring" ideas that she had already conceived or at least adumbrated in her philosophical work, it is surely difficult to deny that, as a novelist (but like any good novelist?), Murdoch was indeed exploring the complexities of our moral life - overthrowing the picture of the moral agent that she found so constricting and distorting in so much of the moral philosophy with which she engaged as a professional philosopher, in favour of a much more complex and realistic "character".

It is important, then, when studying her philosophical work, to re-examine and even re-unmask the picture of the moral agent with which Murdoch found herself in conflict; she has done a great deal to bring out its "main points of interest and attraction". What is equally important, however, and much less noticed, is the way in which she continues a conversation, picking up her interlocutor's thought in a positive and sympathetic spirit, extending and deepening it. Philosophers, after all, need not spend time and energy refuting one another, though that is no doubt their style; they may also corroborate one another's views, accepting and enhancing them with gratitude. Iris Murdoch, at any rate, is exemplary in the way that she builds on other philosophers' work. This is particularly clear in "Vision and Choice". Unlike most such debates at Aristotelian Society meetings, the interlocutors here are not at loggerheads. On the contrary, Murdoch profoundly agrees with her fellow debater. "Vision and Choice", now often read and reprinted on its own, is her considered response to a paper by the then even younger (he was then twenty-nine, she was thirty-seven) philosopher Ronald Hepburn.

Rather oddly described as "a Mr. Hepburn" by the editor of *Existentialists and Mystics* (page xxviii), he became professor of philosophy at the University of Nottingham in 1960 and from 1964 held various chairs at the University of Edinburgh until he retired in 1996. Clearly, he was instrumental in having Murdoch invited to deliver the Gifford Lectures, as she did in 1982. But in other ways his intellectual history overlaps and interweaves with hers. For example, Hepburn studied at the University of Aberdeen with Donald MacKinnon: a significant figure also, at an earlier stage, in Murdoch's life. More to the point, his philosophical concerns run parallel with hers. Hepburn's only book, *Christianity and Paradox: Studies in Twentieth-Century Theology*, (London, 1958), one of the few memorable contributions to the great debate about the nature of religious language that preoccupied philosophers of religion from about 1950 to 1970, is a sustained effort to see what remains of the metaphysics of theism once one accepts the critiques of linguistic analysis, while at the same time eschewing the "demythologizing" of German existentialist theology. Hepburn concludes with what he calls "a regretful agnosticism": a position not very different from that which Murdoch voices on occasion.

In other ways, too, Hepburn was well prepared to be Murdoch's interlocutor, as his later publications attest. Never prolific, he collected his finest papers as *Wonder and Other Essays: Eight Studies in Aesthetics and Neighbouring Fields* (Edinburgh, 1984). Few philosophers in the analytic tradition have worked more usefully on the borderlands of ethics, aesthetics and religion: territory which Murdoch was to make her own in her philosophical work. More specifically, Hepburn moves from the traditional questions of aesthetics (beauty) to discuss the pervasive influence of art on our perception of the world (epistemology, truth) and on our imaginative grasp of the pattern and point of our lives (morality, goodness) - a very Murdochian cluster of themes. In addition, he seeks to bring the topic of the aesthetic appreciation of the natural world to philosophical attention.

Finally, Ronald Hepburn has always been concerned with the aesthetic implications of Christian theism. In the title essay "Wonder", first published in the *Proceedings of the*

Aristotelian Society in 1980, the text of his Presidential Address, Hepburn contends that, while "there are problems over the availability of mystical and numinous experience to a person who rejects their traditional background of metaphysical beliefs (monistic or theistic), the same is not obviously true of a religiously toned wonder, whether directed at particular, arresting objects or events in nature, or at the sheer existence of a world at all" (page 131). While a good deal less attracted than Murdoch was to renewing a certain Platonic philosophy to provide "metaphysics as a guide to morals", Hepburn's focus on philosophical matters is often very like hers. In the end, as "a person who has no confidence at all in any ultimate unification" - that is to say, in any "fuller and ultimate unity of being in God or the One" - Hepburn stays with what he calls the "partial and incompletable transcendence of the ordinary fragmentariness of experience" (page 126). Paradoxically, perhaps, Hepburn the philosopher has much greater respect for the fragmentariness of the moral life than Murdoch the philosopher, with her deeply Platonic yearnings - though of course Murdoch the novelist is a celebrant of that "partial and incompletable transcendence".

Murdoch's response to Hepburn's paper opens by saying that she agrees "very much" with "the general direction" of his argument: "my main criticism will be that he has not made enough of his case". Murdoch's classic paper, that is to say, develops dialectically, building on her colleague's suggestions, advancing and reconstructing them. "Vision and Choice" does not reveal its full sense except in the context of the conversation with Hepburn's preceding paper; but what is exemplary is the way that it enters so sympathetically into what he has to say - rather than, in the more usual philosophical style, striving to find points of disagreement and arguments to refute. Hepburn begins by saying that British moral philosophy (then) was dominated by analysis of moral language in terms of obedience to rules - a narrower conception than hers, as Murdoch notes. He invites us to view moral endeavour rather as "the realizing of a pattern of life or the following out of a pilgrimage" - taking as his evidence the autobiography of the poet and critic Edwin Muir, *The Story and the Fable*, adding phrases from Nicolas Berdyaev, W.B. Yeats and Arthur Koestler. He invites us to consider thinking of ourselves as artists, for example, with our own lives the artifact. Murdoch is very happy with the "extremely rich and various" material which Hepburn brings to bear. It is "the great merit" of his paper that he redirects attention to neglected phenomena in the moral life. But, perhaps paradoxically again, while delighting in Hepburn's notion of the "fable-making" that frames our moral life, it is the future novelist who insists once again on enlarging his proposal: she contends, against his appeal to major works of art, that fable-making is "a fairly natural and ordinary activity of human beings continuous with our most everyday methods of reflecting on and understanding our lives".

To cite one more example, Murdoch contends that Hepburn is (again) "too cautious", when he reminds us that choices in the moral life involve interpretation, reflection and understanding. This she agrees with - but, to her mind, he regards them as "merely preliminaries to choice". This allows her make the decisive move. Our differing moral choices are not only the result of differing intellectual positions, though they often are; they are also, more deeply and pervasively, differences of moral concepts. As she puts it, moral differences are differences of understanding; "we cannot always understand other people's moral concepts" - and this is because of our having a completely different moral vision of the way things are. The central point of Murdoch's "Vision and Choice" (still far from generally understood) goes much more deeply than anything that Hepburn says - but it is by extending what he says that she reaches it (and it is perhaps still by going through what he says that one is most likely to understand her point).

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The Response of Italian Critics to the Work of Iris Murdoch

Iris Murdoch has made no secret of her love for Italy, and many of her characters flee there as to a mythical Promised Land. The Italians discovered Iris Murdoch in 1963 when she chaired the jury of the Formentor Literary Prize and the International Prize at Corfu and met with great personal success. When *A Severed Head* appeared, and critics acclaimed her as an English version of Simone de Beauvoir and as the leading British exponent of existentialism, although she had early recoiled from it. *A Severed Head* was described as an exciting new version of the eternal triangle, or rather of a series of triangles. Enzo Golino commented that the novel was a hilarious joke at the expense of psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts and compared it to Goethe's *Elective Affinities*. Giancarlo Vigorelli, who states that he had followed Murdoch's career with great interest from *Under the Net* onwards, views *A Severed Head* as a fable, an allegory, a parody, a morality play, and an opera bouffe. Vigorelli affirms that he has rarely read such a "modern" and such an amusing novel. Oreste del Buono, a well-known writer and literary critic, comments with admiring stupefaction that Martin, an exceptionally convincing male character, was created by a woman.

Mario Praz, Italy's foremost scholar in the field of English literature, compares Dame Iris's work to that of Eliot and the sixteenth-century dramatists. Praz also notes some similarities in theme and character between *The Italian Girl* and *A Severed Head*. He notes that the function of the foreign interlopers who disrupt the lives of Edmund's relatives in *The Italian Girl* is not dissimilar from that of the Jewish siblings, Honor and Palmer, in *A Severed Head* (or, one might add, that of the Lusiewicz brothers in *The Flight from the Enchanter*). Michele Dzieduszycki affirms that, in writing this novel, Iris Murdoch was directly inspired by Freud's essay on Leonardo da Vinci. He underlines that the humour that pervades her novels is not snobbish and frivolous like Waugh, but is based on ambiguity and often leads to the tragic and the grotesque.

Michele Abbate underlines the Freudian elements in *The Italian Girl*, purporting that Murdoch tends to construct her novels as living exemplifications of Freudian theory. According to Abbate, Murdoch's novels demonstrate that sexual repression is the real source of man's unhappiness, cruelty and hypocrisy. Like other Italian critics, Abbate comments ironically on the paradigm according to which northern writers depict Italy as the country of a Panic abandonment to nature and sunlight. Blinded by their own inhibitions, writers from northern countries fail to perceive those of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean world. In fact, Maggie hides within herself the darkness of an impenetrable mystery.

In March, 1968, I had the honour of welcoming Iris Murdoch and John Bayley to my home in Turin. She had come to Italy on a lecture tour organized by ACI (Associazione Italiana Culturale). On this occasion she "bravely" read her text in Italian. The title she had chosen was "The Voice of Philosophy in the World of Today." Grazia Marchiano pointed out that Murdoch had preferred to avoid giving too specialised a lecture. Instead, she outlined her own views on recent developments in Western philosophy, politics and art. She tended to identify with those of Sartre's characters who felt they were living in a metaphysical void. She approved of Marxist ideals and sociology, but not the system and the religion. After her lecture in Milan, one member of the audience asked if it were possible to speak of the "silence" of the voice of philosophy in the world of today. Dame Iris answered that it was perfectly possible. Dr. Maria Solimini of the Institute of Philosophy of Bari University, while awaiting Dame Iris's lecture, published an illuminating article in the *Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* (March 28, 1968) entitled "Has Philosophy a Voice in the World of Today?" Murdoch replied that philosophy can have a positive function now only if it offers a new moral content, a new "theory of good."

Iris Murdoch demonstrates what is "good" as opposed to what is "nice" in *The Nice and the Good*, which was published in Italy in 1968. The alliterative Italian title *I belli e I buoni* confused the Italian critics because "I belli" is not an exact translation of "the nice." A toad, for example, can be "nice" but can never be "bello." In an article entitled "The Loves and the Spies of Iris Murdoch," Piero Pignata affirms that the world of the novel is only apparently happy because the human relationships are based on what is only apparently or externally beautiful.

It is only thanks to the efforts of Ducane as *deus-ex-machina* that new relationships are formed in which what is "good" can substitute for what is "bello" so that each of the six couples can move towards permanent although imperfect happiness.

Geraldo Baglioni interviewed Iris Murdoch in Florence where she had given a lecture exploring the effect of morality on art and vice versa. When asked which was her favourite novel, she had answered, *The Nice and the Good*, possibly, added Baglioni, because it is more tenderhearted and less cerebral than the others are. In an interview with Grazia Levi, Iris Murdoch explained how in *The Nice and the Good* she had finally formulated what she had tentatively touched on in previous novels, that is, the abyss which divides what is conventionally good, and what is external and illusory from the good that makes no judgement, that seeks no power over others, that asks for no reward. In Baglioni's interview Murdoch also admitted that there was something of herself in Frances in *The Red and the Green*. The writer herself had experienced Frances's difficulty in explaining the past to the new generation. She felt it was a pity that so few young people were attracted by politics. She herself firmly believed in the efficiency and the solidity of the British democratic system.

The Unicorn was serialized in Italian in the women's magazine, *Amica*, in the winter of 1969. Paolo Santoro remarks that Murdoch approved of the Italian title, *La sua parte di colpa*, which means "her share of the blame." Rather than stressing Hannah's undeniable guilt, Murdoch surely wanted to emphasize Hannah's association with the numinous in entitling the novel *The Unicorn*. Can we really believe that Murdoch agreed to her allegorical title being changed to one so Victorian and moralistic? *A sua parte di colpa* was published in book form by Feltrinelli, the publishing house principally responsible for promoting Murdoch's novels in Italy. The Italian critics tended to judge the novel unfavourably--finding both characters and plot unconvincing.

Bruno's Dream was translated into Italian in 1971, again by Gabriella Fiori Andreini. According to Carlo Pagetti, Murdoch's precise and lucid prose becomes wooden and stilted in the hands of her Italian translator. Pagetti compares Murdoch to Muriel Spark, with whom she shares an interest in the macabre. Pagetti comments that Murdoch's vision of the world has changed little since the publication of *A Severed Head*, which he considers to be her most interesting novel. Her work appears to consist of complicated codes full of mysterious and indecipherable signs. Bruno's world, like the worlds we have encountered in Murdoch's previous novels, is lacking in authentic moral values, but the irony that dominated the earlier novels has now given way to pity. Murdoch's religious sense induces her to look to the East rather than to Christianity.

When *The Time of the Angels* was translated into Italian in 1972, Italian critics found the novel more cruel than the previous novels. Luigi Baccolo finds the characters ghostly and notes with horror the presence of Satanism. Carlo Pagetti saw Murdoch as a more cultured version of Muriel Spark. She avoids the social platitudes of Anthony Powell and Angus Wilson. He underlines her interest in metaphysics and theology and identifies the central theme of the novel as the absence of a merciful an unifying divinity. Pagetti identifies the absence of God as the absence of love. Hence, no authentic redemption is possible, and at the end of the novel, each character remains alone.

Amica serialised *An Unofficial Rose* and entitled it *The Years of Whisky and Roses*. However, when Feltrinelli published the novel in book form some months later, a literal translation of the original title was used. Critics such as Angelo Sibilo and Domenico Porzio favourably reviewed this novel.

In November, 1986, Dame Iris returned to Italy to promote her novel, *The Good Apprentice*, and to give a series a lectures in various Italian universities. Her chosen title for these lectures was *Literature and Morality*. According to Luca Caioli, she stated that literature must carry a moral message, but it must be neither pedantic nor ideological, nor must it serve either a political regime or a religion. She explained that she was not a philosophical writer but that some of her plots and situations might have been suggested by her knowledge of philosophy. Laura Lilli, who interviewed Iris Murdoch in Milan, commented in her article, "Iris Murdoch: A Taste of the Sea," that there are at least twenty references to the sea in *The Good*

Apprentice. *The Good Apprentice* was published in Italian by Feltrinelli in 1987, with the title *L'apprendista* (The Apprentice). Lilli questioned Murdoch about her interest in Sartre, Benjamin, and Adorno. Murdoch affirmed that she had never been an existentialist and that, according to her, Sartre's ideas concerning freedom and morality were completely wrong. She had been more interested in Benjamin and Adorno than in Sartre because they had attempted to humanize Marxism. Lilli asserted that Murdoch had been first an experimental writer, had been subsequently influenced by the "angry young men", and now wrote traditional novels. Dame Iris replied that journalists had invented the "angry young men" and that Beckett and Adorno had influenced her early novels. She denied that writers, especially great writers, always rewrote the same book, with the possible exception of Jane Austen, one of her favourite writers, together with Emily Bronte. Lilli suggested that *The Good Apprentice* was a modern version of *Pilgrim's Progress* and asked whether it could be classified as a "conte philosophique." Why classify it? Was Iris Murdoch's answer. A novel is an individual form of expression in which the author's thought must flow freely.

In the newspaper *Paese Sera* in an article entitled "Ambiguous Writing," Antonella Ungaro and Marina Pivetta accuse Murdoch of leaving her female characters in the background. This topic is addressed in a separate interview with Tina Honsel when Murdoch explains that she has always been interested in the emancipation of women, but that she did not hold extremist views. She believed that if gender roles were to be reversed the consequences could only be negative. Women had emerged from the ghetto in which men had always confined them, but the risk now existed of creating another kind of ghetto.

In October, 1990, Francesco Russo published an interview he had been granted with Dame Iris in her home in Oxford. Russo begins by affirming that the unmistakable English lady who opens the door to him could be a Miss Marple, unassuming but, like a modern version of Lady Macbeth, familiar with the secret actions that murder sleep. When Russo questioned her about why she had taught philosophy, she replied that before the sixties she would not have been able to live on what she earned with her creative writing. When questioned as to whether Sartre had influenced her, Dame Iris replied in the negative, explaining that she had written *Sartre, Romantic Rationalist* in 1953 because he fascinated her as a person. He towered over the intellectual scene. The only other time she had seen an intellectual acclaimed as a prophet was when she heard Jacques Derrida lecturing in 1984. In the thirties, she explains, she had been briefly attracted to Marxism on account of her intense emotional participation in the Spanish Civil War. She recalls her arguments with Roy Jenkins, who was then a fellow student at Oxford. Jenkins was right and I was wrong to hold such extremist views, admits Dame Iris. She is not proud of having voted for Margaret Thatcher in 1983. She is proud, however, of being a Dame of the British Empire, a title which was conferred on her by Mrs. Thatcher. She affirms that she does not believe in God, or in the Resurrection or the divinity of Christ. She believes, however, that Christianity ought to survive for the salvation of the planet. She has studied Buddhism and affirms that Christ is her Buddha. Her religious sense does not depend upon a personal god, but is rather an innate drive towards goodness in the Platonic sense. She is grateful to Plato for having affirmed that women, too, can be philosophers.

The most important of her essays on philosophy, she affirms, is *The Sovereignty of Good*; while the most recent was *Acastos*, a diptych of platonic dialogues. Russo commented that she had abjured Marxism when she was converted to Platonism and asked Murdoch if she still had time to dedicate to philosophy. Her answer was that every morning from seven to nine she studied philosophy.

In her book, *Work for the Spirit*, Elizabeth Dipple noted that Dame Iris never referred to contemporary writers as great either in her novels or in her theoretical writings. It is therefore not surprising that, when Russo asked her who her favourite authors were, she replied that, among her contemporaries, she only read the novels of her old friend Kingsley Amis. She read and reread Proust, James, Tolstoi, Dostoevski, Dickens and Christian mystics such as Jakob Boehme and Meister Eckhart. Her "patron saint" was, however, Shakespeare. Russo hailed Dame Iris as England's foremost English writer, but important novels such as *A Fairly*

Honourable Defeat, The Black Prince, The Sea, The Sea, and *An Accidental Man* have not been translated into Italian. When she died, only two of her novels, *The Italian Girl* and *The Book and the Brotherhood*, were in print in Italy. Sadly, her death passed almost unnoticed.

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With acknowledgement to the archivsts of Feltrinelli and Einaudi, Iris Murdoch's chief publishers in Italy, for their assistance in preparing these materials.

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Review: *Iris and Her Friends: A Memoir of Memory and Desire* by John Bayley. (New York: Norton, 2000. 275 pp $22.95.) [Published in Britain under the title *Iris and the Friends*.]

Loving, caring, and learning to be human are the keynotes of this sequel to John Bayley's acclaimed *Elegy for Iris* (1999). In the present memoir, he copes with his wife's terminal illness, turning the alarming, absurd, and intolerable situation into a serious game and finding courage and dignity in crisis. His telling of it (from a diary he kept) fuses tragedy with comedy. Occasional moments of raw emotion and suffering recall *King Lear*, but such allusions are only lightly touched on. The "Friends" of the title are compensations such as love, humor, and compassion that make extremity supportable. The alchemy of Bayley's approach is to transform an appalling situation into one that can be lived through, so that suffering gives birth to wisdom and a modicum of good comes out of ill.

While the daily domestic vicissitudes of looking after an Alzheimer's patient are faithfully and often wryly, recorded, Bayley does not disguise the unbridgeable gap that the disease opens up. The narrator cannot pretend to know what his stricken subject is going through and chooses instead to focus on his own reactions and resources. His sympathetic, yet La Rochefoucauldian, reflections are refreshingly direct. The ambiguity and irony (as well as love) at the heart of the relationship are revealed. Yet Bayley displays kindness in the midst of irritation, warmth when the other seems out of reach, and honesty in place of sentimentality. It would not be fair to call his memoir exploitative. Truth is important here as in Murdoch's philosophy, revealing dimensions of humanity beyond the desire to impose meaning and order. Bayley honors Murdoch's belief in the "opacity of persons." He is pragmatic and flexible, espousing the consolations of fantasy, when they afford pleasure, self-exploration, or escape, despite Iris's strictures against them. Moreover, he notes that "she <u>does</u> mix fantasy with reality, but at the higher level, so to speak." Living close to an unbearable reality makes him appreciative of imagination, and he adopts Belial in *Paradise Lost* as his familiar spirit: "For who would lose/ Though full of pain, this intellectual being,/ These thoughts that wander through eternity...." The erotic and creative drives that bring a couple together are transmuted into caring, yet the memoirist is able to balance the practical demands of caregiving against the desire to sustain his own innerlife. In the later stages, Iris appears "a very foreign sort of foreigner," a mythic figure beyond all contact and consigned to "the Dark Lord who is drawing her further and further into his own underworld." Yet the reality of love survives: "I cannot <u>imagine</u> Iris. But then I never have done.... Love does not need fantasy, nor imagination either"--necessary though they may be to the isolated self.

While Bayley's biographical sketch of Iris admits impediments, his self-recollection is surprisingly enhanced. In focusing on a strange darkened "She," he gains a personal bonus in illumination of himself. The motive of self-discovery through memory deflects biography into autobiography. As the person he has spent his adult life with becomes a memory, the author proceeds to reclaim large tracts of subjectivity in memories of his own childhood and early manhood--including comic experiences in the army and courtships. By attention to the other--Simone Weil's version of love--the caregiver is paradoxically given back the key to himself. If *Elegy for Iris* witnessed the way that such attention can salvage personal values from disintegration, *Iris and Her Friends* affirms the value of mutuality, a flexible strength at the heart of relationship. Even when it seems menial, self-sacrificing, and obligatory, caring can be interactive. There are surprising, irrational flashes of response, as if Iris's old self were never completely obliterated even

behind Alzheimer's distorting lineaments. Bayley's book is predominantly a self-portrait rather than a portrait of Iris, yet her condition is the catalyst for changes in himself. Moments of accord keep breaking in on "the dreary solipsistic trance" (see *The Bell*)--moments that are all the more authentic for being wordless. The author affirms a unique core of selfhood that seems to underlie mental confusion and aberrant behaviors.

The mental energies of the couple show a paradoxical economy, with his "feast of memory" coinciding with her loss of it. So interdependent are they in their habits, that he speculates: "Might she herself be soothed by some obscure knowledge of the compensatory pleasures which memory, let loose now like a horse in a meadow, is bringing me?" The La Rochefoucauldian principle gets even clearer expression when Bayley admits: "I have a horrid feeling that I enjoy such things more and more now, because Iris does not ... More as if her inner desolation has stimulated my own receptivity, my own inner powers of response." Detachment liberates the caregiver from too close an identification with the patient. The notion of egotism seems innocuous or bracing here, so much have their lives become intertwined. One feels that Iris would have approved of such frankness.

One of the uses of adversity is the author's joyful discovery of his own memories, which compensates to some degree for the inaccessibility of his partner's mind. While shared thoughts and speech fall away, "childhood's daydream world" occupies the foreground of consciousness. References to Proust are inevitable: although Bayley finds Proust's theory "pretentious," he evokes moments of being through poetic imagery of light, smell, place, and action. There is much charm and enlargement of being beyond the narrow confines of the present in these memories. Bayley, who has recently written novels as well as literary criticism, drops apercus almost casually: "The happiest marriages are full of alternative lives, lived in the head, unknown to the partner"; "love is on easy terms with sudden rage, with violent exasperation, but surely not with hatred?"; "it is those who have become lonely in a relationship who find most release in fantasy." His style is, by turns, humorous, conversational, lyrical or poetic (as in his ode to autumn in Oxford).

Iris had a talent for friendship, "being deeply interested in the lives of the people she liked" and "extend[ed] this interest to professional interviewers." People she knew early on included Cyril Connolly, Stephen Spender, Arthur Koestler, Elizabeth Bowen, Evelyn Waugh, and the young Frank Thompson, killed in the Balkans campaign. In Australia, the couple met Patrick White, with whom Iris discussed her work, together with that of James and Dostoevsky, Forster and Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence. While White admired Lawrence, he pointed to a contradiction between his "lofty contempt for the ego in art," and his allowing his own ego "an effortless superiority over the personalities of his friends," in novels. Murdoch believed that a novelist must put ego aside in order to imagine the reality of others. While she denied using real people in fiction, Bayley says that she did so in a metaphysical rather than a personal sense, her imagination being deeply imbued with observation of others. Only rarely does he touch on specific novels, as when he sees the mysterious Jackson of *Jackson's Dilemma* as a symbolic foreshadowing of Alzheimer's.

Before she married Bayley, Iris came under the influence of Elias Canetti, who exerted some strange power over her. In a nightmare sequence, Bayley expresses his fear and resentment of this Pluto-like figure, who may be reflected in characters like Mischa Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter* or Peter Mir in *The Green Knight*. Canetti, casting a dark shadow, "was the primal power figure. Iris's one-time lover, tyrant, dominator, and master. Teacher, too, and inspiration. The great all-knowing Dichter." In Bayley's fantasy, he appears with a crocodile smile and is directly compared with that other tyrant, Dr. Alzheimer. In the condensed symbolism of the dream, Dr. Canetti seems to have bestowed a madwoman on his rival. But the Friends--"Humour, normality, love"--are not easily routed. Bayley stops the car and puts his arms around his wife, and "[she] was just Iris, Iris as I had always known her and loved her." In this struggle between good and evil, he affirms "the care that was between us" and "[in] giving it, I received it back, twice blessed."

Identity is a function of relationship. Reading Iris's letters to a wartime lover, Bayley concludes: "I cannot recognise the person who was writing at all" (225). He distinguishes the Irises "of ten, twenty, thirty years ago" from the afflicted person of the present and believes that, if Iris had married someone else (Canetti or the wartime fiancé), she would have become a different

woman. *Iris and Her Friends*, although it tells more about the author than about his subject, is an engaging meditation on the possibilities and limits of the self.

Jack Stewart,
University of British Columbia

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Review: *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fictions* by Bran Nicol (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd.; New York: St. Martin' s Press, Inc., 1999, xv, 166pp).

By "retrospective fictions," Bran Nicol means Iris Murdoch's first-person novels: *Under the Net*, *A Severed Head*, *The Italian Girl*, *The Black Prince*, *A Word Child*, and *The Sea, The Sea*. Nicol says that he concentrates on what these novels have in common rather than how they are different, so it comes as no surprise that he does not treat fully any of the six novels. But in the course of a closely argued and densely packed 144 pages of text, he offers a fresh and valuable perspective on many of these novels' distinctive features.

Nicol begins by setting Murdoch's novels in context. It turns out that although Murdoch objects to contemporary ideas and narrative practices, she has affinities with them. She displays Bakhtin's polyphony, but not his notion of carnival. She objects to psychoanalysis, yet she adopts Freud's ideas. (She agrees with Freud that humans are impelled by erotic energies, but disagrees with his focus on "lower" impulses.) She attacks "crystalline" modern novels with their allegorical structures, preferring the realism and the stable, knowable characters of the great nineteenth century novels. Yet she acknowledges that such works depended upon a society with a coherent system of values, a society that no longer exists. As a result, a Murdoch novel, though it may contain many myths and systems, is not coherent in the way *Middlemarch* is coherent. Murdoch often underlines this difference by emphasizing contingency-accidental events-and the freedom of her unstable characters from any kind of narrow definition. In short, Nicol gives a good sense of Murdoch's "interface" with the twentieth century. (What stature Murdoch has to make such a sentence possible without irony!)

Although Murdoch objects to the determinism and extreme rationalism of much post-modernism, Nicol allies her to this movement in her treatment of myth. Myths abound in Murdoch; most Murdoch characters create myths about their lives, but readers do not sense any metamyth behind this activity. In its place, we sense an almost Bakhtinian polyphony or multiplicity of myths.

Here we arrive at Nicol's retrospective focus. In Murdoch's first-person novels we see the process of myth-making from the inside, but unlike modernist authors she has her heroes present their stories in such a way that they undo themselves. They stand revealed as neurotic, selfish men who try to compartmentalize their activities and to control their women. Their limitations are made clear to the reader by a dialogue, not so much with other characters as with author herself. The result is that Murdoch's first person novels are filled with irony, whereas modernist first-person novels are not.

Nicol then divides the retrospective novels into two groups. In *A Severed Head*, *The Italian Girl*, and *A Word Child*, the narrator remains close to his earlier self. In these novels, the result of the heroes' retrospection does not seem to have brought much change. By contrast, in *Under the Net*, *The Black Prince*, and *The Sea, The Sea* the narrator tries to break free from the past and achieves some success. Jake in *Under the Net* is revealed as an *epistemophile*, a man who searches for clues in all events only to misread them all. In *The Sea, The Sea*, the sea monster symbolizes many things, including the dark forces so deep in Charles's mind that they are unsignifiable in any other way.

This reviewer found the treatment of *The Black Prince* the least convincing, for Nicol joins a minority of critics who think the postscripts to this novel call everything Bradley has said into question. Nicol's general position forces him into this reading. At one point, he states as truth his own metamyth: everyone knows that all values are relative. Because of this assumption, even when Murdoch (and Conradi and Dipple) says we should believe in Bradley,

Nicol thinks she should not be heeded. His assumption also makes it awkward for him to recognize other things that may be more than arbitrary myths for Murdoch: the Idea of Good and the myth of the flaying of Marsyas.

Nicol has written an interesting and lucid book about Murdoch's narrators, a subject that has not had proper attention. Not only does it have valuable insight into its six novels, but it provides striking remarks in passing about *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, *Jackson's Dilemma* (the most interesting comments I have seen on this odd book), *The Green Knight*, and *The Good Apprentice*. For sheer ingenuity, look to the comparison of Gerard's wonderful bird Grey in *The Book and the Brotherhood* and the eponymous hero of Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot*.

George Soule
Carleton College
Northfield, Minnesota

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Review: *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker, editors. 266pp Chicago University Press, distributed in the UK by Wiley. £38.50 (paperback £15.25). ISBN 0 226 02112 2.

This review is adapted from a longer article entitled "Not by Argument Alone" which also reviewed Iris Murdoch's *Existentialists and Mystics*, edited by Peter Conradi, and which was originally published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 22nd 1997. We are grateful to the *TLS* for their permission to reprint it here.

One of Murdoch's most significant contributions to moral philosophy has been to raise the possibility that the rigour philosophy requires can take forms other than the argumentative. Her writings exemplify what one might call literary rigour - a capacity to elucidate and evaluate the ramifications of existing and influential images and conceptualizations, and to forge new ones whose implications serve to reorient our thinking in more fruitful ways. According to Murdoch's conceptualization of morality and moral philosophy, such creative accountings are the only way in which we can make progress in the clarification of our consciousness. And the very idea implies that it will take, not an argument, but a shift of vision, a reorientation in thought, for this to be properly appreciated. A key virtue of the papers collected in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* is that many of their authors do appreciate this aspect of her work.

Books based on conference proceedings usually present a very mixed bag; variations in quality are often radical, and papers which appeal to one reader will very often be of no interest to another. In this case, however, an admirable clarity of focus and level of debate has been achieved, for which praise is undoubtedly due to the editors as well as the contributors. The papers are distributed between three sections, supposedly devoted respectively to Murdoch's conceptions of the history of philosophy, of the relation between morality and literature, and of the relation between morality and religion. These labels would, however, be better thought of as isolating themes which preoccupy most of the contributors to a greater or lesser degree, in relation to which they bring to bear expertise in philosophy, literary criticism and theology.
The more philosophical contributions seem to me to be the strongest, including as they do, papers by Charles Taylor and Martha Nussbaum, which help to clarify the nature of their own distinctive projects by engaging in real detail with that of Murdoch. I would, however, single out even among these the paper by Cora Diamond. "We are Perpetually Moralists". It provides an immensely helpful and detailed analysis of the dispute between Murdoch and the analytical moral philosopher R.M. Hare, and makes clear precisely how difficult that disagreement must be to resolve, by showing how Hare will always be inclined to transfer Murdoch's reminders into terms which elide their true significance, and why the dispute must inevitably involve disagreements concerning philosophical method as well as issues of moral substance.

Of the generally less strong contributions by theologians and moral theorists, the paper by Maria Antonaccio (one of the editors of the collection) is also outstanding. She shows a

remarkably detailed and wide-ranging grasp of Murdoch's writings as a whole, and sees in particular how the content of her moral vision requires that it be given expression in a very distinctive manner. This means that she can give a very illuminating defence of the form of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, which has been dismissed by some readers as a philosophical version of the loose, baggy monsters of Murdoch's fiction.

The most recessive aspect of the collection is in fact its treatment of that fiction. Although other papers glance at the matter, only one addresses it directly, and it is one of the more disappointing. I do no think that this is entirely its author's fault. Just as Murdoch's philosophical work challenges the prevailing methods in analytical moral philosophy, so her novels pose thematic and formal problems that much contemporary literary criticism is ill equipped to confront. Composing a collection of papers, or a book-length study, that engaged systematically with problems – the occlusion of the political realm, the fracturing of unities of theme and character, the conjunction of mythic and erotic energies, and the increasing reliance on sentences in which nouns require comet-tails of adjectives in their pursuit of truthful perception–really would be an achievement.

Stephen Mulhall
New College, Oxford

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Review: *Iris Murdoch's Giffords, a Study of the 1982 Gifford Lectures. Occasional Paper of Theology in Scotland*, edited by R. A. Gillies. St. Mary's College, University of St Andrews, 1995.

Iris Murdoch gave the Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh in 1981-1982 and, as has become the custom, some time elapsed before they were published. Ten years, in fact. *Metaphysics As A Guide to Morals* appeared in 1992, but without any indication that the book was in fact the published version of her Giffords. "...[T]he book lacks many of the social decencies which usually grace published Gifford Lectures. There are no frontispiece acknowledgments to the Gifford Bequest, neither for host university courtesies nor yet for the honour of being invited to present the Lectures." So writes Robert Gillies in his introduction to "Iris Murdoch's Giffords," a symposium held at St. Andrew's in 1993. He notes further that Iris Murdoch declined an invitation to the symposium as well as the opportunity to comment on the papers delivered.

Of the five participants in the symposium, four are associated with St. Andrews, one with Aberdeen; two are theologians (Michael Partridge and Richard Bauckham), two are philosophers (Gordon Graham and Robert Gillies), one is an art historian (Rosemary Muir Wright). Partridge's contribution is many times the length of the others and in it he gives both a survey of the book as well as an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Bauckham picks up on a Murdoch remark about Lear as providing the best model for confronting the absurdity of death and counters with the example of *A Winter's Tale*. It is Murdoch's demythologizing of Christianity that offends him as it does Partridge. Gillies bases his remarks on an aside Murdoch made about Martin Buber, and he, too, is clearly upset by her demythologizing. Graham considers Murdoch's "moral platonism." In the end it is the demythologizing of religion that dismays all the members of the symposium. Wright considers Murdoch's treatment of art as a refuge when religion goes, but sees hers as a spectator's approach in which the spectator is "the main protagonist in the creation of the work of art."

All the contributions to the symposium are polite, apologetic more in the social than in the theological sense. Perhaps it would be unfair to say that the participants give the impression that they consider themselves on the losing side, but they do seem almost willing to go gentle into the dark night Iris Murdoch offers. Of course, they are commenting on a dense and largely incoherent work, an *omnium gatherum* in which many parts bear little relation to the ostensible whole. Iris Murdoch's Giffords sum up and illustrate everything that went wrong with philosophy in the twentieth century. In many ways she is an anachronistic member of Bloomsbury. If the book has any patron it is not Plato, I think, but G. E. Moore. This of

course makes the title ironic – metaphysics affords no guide to morals. Murdoch accepts and thinks in terms of the divorce of value judgments from the world that characterized the *Principia Ethica* (1903). Anything whatsoever can be good because there is no logical or ontological link between what a thing is and the recognition that it is good. Moore himself retained a kind of intuitionism, as if good were objective but just inaccessible by means of communicable knowledge. The history of twentieth century Anglo-American philosophy can be traced from acceptance of what Moore called the Naturalistic Fallacy – the belief that our judgment that something is good is based on natural properties of that thing. If Russian literature came out of Gogol's Overcoat, the mainstream of English language philosophy came out of Moore's *Principia*.

The divorce of sensibility from reality in the case of value judgments soon became a special instance of the more general view that the only truths we can attain are either tautologies or judgments expressive of sense data. Before the century was out, language would be thought to be the repository of any reality we can know and all efforts to relate language to anything extra-linguistic, anything metaphysical, were doomed to failure. Religious beliefs went the way of value judgments early on and nothing in the sequel of twentieth-century philosophy restored the robust confidence that things themselves are good and God exists. This is the ambience in which Iris Murdoch thought and wrote. She tried to resist it by her "moral platonism" – *The Sovereignty of the Good* seemed, when it appeared, an alternative to the regnant analytic philosophy, but as *Metaphysics the Guide of Morals* makes clear, all she had to offer was an aesthetic disguise for received philosophical opinion. It is this that gives her novels such importance.

All art is moral in that it constitutes a transcendent presentation of the evanescent and momentary, the suggestion of the meaning had by acts and objects eroding in the flow of time. How does one do this when belief in God and immortality and a meaning not bestowed by us is lost? Camus asked if absurd art was possible, that is, an art which sought to convey the view that life is meaningless. Of course, that would be its meaning, and up to that point it was not absurd. Matthew Arnold pointed the way in the 19th century. He was every bit as much a demythologizer as Murdoch and like her he felt melancholy at the passing of religious faith. So did Ernest Renan. As, as A. N. Wilson has recently reminded us, did Thomas Hardy. "God's Funeral" is rueful rather than triumphant. Expressed as philosophy, Iris Murdoch's views invite the criticism, however gentle, of these symposiasts. But her novels remain, their achievement the presentation of casts of characters for whom metaphysics provides no guide to morals. Readers with a richer perspective than their author can perhaps become "the main protagonist in the creation of the work of art."

Ralph McInerny
University of Notre Dame

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Review: *Four British Women Novelists: Anita Brookner, Margaret Drabble, Iris Murdoch, Barbara Pym; An Annotated and Critical Secondary Bibliography* (Magill Bibliographies) by George Soule. Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow Press, and Pasadena, CA and Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Salem Press, 1998.

This is a delightful book (and not merely because it says some nice things about the present reviewer and other contributors to the *Iris Murdoch News Letter*). The section on Iris Murdoch (the one that concerns us here) is, like the others, organised on logical lines: "General Studies" are followed by "Criticism of Individual Novels" (listed in chronological order of publication), "Bibliographical Studies" and "Other Works" (a brief overview of the philosophical and critical writings, the verse, the libretto and the plays).

The listings, George Soule explains in his introduction, are not selective: they cover all the criticism devoted to the fiction from 1954 to the end of 1996. His bibliography is, however, critical: "although I do not try to grade each item, I do make a number of explicit critical

judgments, especially about particularly fine articles and books", Soule writes; "in addition, I make many judgments implicitly: a long and detailed summary usually implies that an item is worth a substantial amount of attention" (p. xii). The explicit judgments are the reverse of bland, and users will be grateful for his candour.

Soule is a self-confessed devotee of the novelists he focuses upon. He would have liked, he says, to have been able to include Muriel Spark, Angela Carter, A. S. Byatt, and Fay Weldon (p. xi), but you get the feeling that he is none too sorry that the requisite second volume was not made available to him, leaving him free to concentrate on the authors he reveres: "reading these novels has given me a great deal of pleasure", he says. "In addition, they have taught me about art, about how people live, about the range of ideas people can entertain, and about what possibilities life holds and does not hold. I think", he concludes, "these authors are great artists" (pp. xii-xiii). How Iris would have appreciated those sentiments.

Soule quotes me (quite correctly: his scholarship is impeccable - I could not find any mistakes) as saying that as far as I am concerned the greatest novels are *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and *The Black Prince* (p. 161; he also informs us, p. 145, that Harold Bloom's 'western canon' affords pride of place to *Bruno's Dream* and *The Good Apprentice*, a rather less sensible choice in my view). I have long been struck, as Soule mentions (p. 352), by the brief sentence in the postscript to *The Black Prince* in which Julian says she once loved Bradley. This is the moral bedrock of the story: it validates Bradley's version of events and invalidates Rachel's, and had it been produced in evidence in the court of appeal, it would have resulted in Bradley's conviction for murder being quashed as unsatisfactory and unsafe. Such are, indeed, the "possibilities life holds and does not hold", the contingencies and accidents of human existence which Iris Murdoch understood so clearly and which her critics, as the painstaking documentation in this book shows, have helped a wider public to appreciate more fully as well.

John Fletcher
University of Kent at Canterbury

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Review: *La Vision dans L'Univers Romanesque d'Iris Murdoch* by Mathilde La Cassagnère (Cédex, France: Septentrion Presses Universitaires, 1998)

Mathilde La Cassagnère's literary analysis concentrates on thirteen novels out of twenty-six, from *Under the Net* (1954) to *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), five having been published after 1985, but there are also many references to Iris Murdoch's other novels and to her philosophical essays (leaving out her plays and poems).

Iris Murdoch always wanted to write a novel without a hero, only filled with many secondary characters, but she never completed it. She proved to be in favour of a "vision with" and in nineteen out of her twenty-six books, almost everything is seen through the eyes of her secondary characters and not through the vision of an omniscient narrator. One of Mathilde La Cassagnère's aims is thus to guide the reader through what she considers as a necessary rite of passage in order to get full benefit from many of the novelist's characters who are themselves often unable to decipher the world in which they live. This point is particularly developed and well-[argued] with regard to *The Sea, the Sea*, *Nuns and Soldiers* and *The Philosopher's Pupil*, where Iris Murdoch uses multifocalisation with N as a "hybrid narrator", going from the first to an omniscient third person.

While debunking what she sometimes calls the pathologies of the author's vision, Mathilde La Cassagnère tracks down "the Murdochian Eye" through the multiple points of view of her characters and tries to highlight some of her obsessions so as to reveal the author's "personal secret mythology" (Barthes).

[La Cassagnère] thus maps out a newly organized, highly original cosmic universe in which she convincingly isolates and analyzes an impressive bestiary in the author's fictitious world where relationships are often comparable to those of a raptor with its prey and where violence is generally used by the victim upon the attacker. Iris Murdoch's narrative technique

is sometimes analyzed as if it were a painter's, and pictorial intertextuality includes paintings by Gainsborough (*The Painter's Daughter Chasing a Butterfly*) and by Magritte. Even though the perspective is highly personal, it is backed up by quotations from Bachelard, Bergson, Barthes, Genette and Starobinski (*L'il Vivant*).

This book should be a great help for readers (new and old) to find their way through the often complex Murdochian maze. Mathilde La Cassagnère, who is a senior lecturer at the University of Chambery, is herself a very perceptive reader and critic. She is an active member of the SEAC (*Société d'Études Anglaises Contemporaines*) and a contributor to EBC (*Études Britanniques Contemporaines*) and to various other French journals. She was lucky enough to meet and interview Iris Murdoch and John Bayley and was thus able to test her own interpretation of Murdoch's works with the author's approval. This study places her as one of the most competent French specialists in Murdochian studies.

François Gallix
Paris IV-Sorbonne

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Editorial Column

Forthcoming
Harper-Collins will bring out a third edition of Peter Conradi's *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* probably to coincide with the publication of Conradi's forthcoming biography of Iris Murdoch.

Conferences
The conference "Iris Murdoch: De schrijfster als filosoof de filosoof als schrijfster," was held and the International Scool at Wijsbegeerte, Leusden, Holland on 25th and 26th March 2000. The papers concentrated on Murdoch's philosophical themes and how they influence her fiction. Papers were presented by Drs. Marje Altorf, Prof. dr. Edith H.L. Brugmans, Prof. dr. Wil F.C.M. Derkse, Dr. Richard Todd, Prof. dr. Jacques De Visscher and Dr. Mariëtte F. Willemsen.
A conference on Iris Murdoch's philosophy will take place on 6th and 7th April 2001 at Brown University, Rhode Island on Iris Murdoch. There will be six speakers, including Peter Conradi. Contact: Jim Broakes, Box 1918, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island.

Iris Murdoch Session: The Iris Murdoch session at the 2000 Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, was entitled "Iris Murdoch and the Carnivalesque." Barbara Stevens Heusel chaired the panel and read her paper, "Three-ring Extravaganzas: The Carnivalesque in Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Murdoch's *The Philosopher's Pupil*." The other papers were presented by Darlene Mettler, "Murdoch's Roman Holiday: Carnivalesque Imagery in *The Italian Girl*," and Cheryl Bove, "Carnivalesque Iconography in Murdoch's *Henry and Cato*."

Call for Papers: The Iris Murdoch Society will try to place a session at this conference yearly; anyone who is interested in presenting a paper or suggesting a topic for future Iris Murdoch panels should contact Barbara Stevens Heusel, Northwest Missouri State University, Department of English, 800 University Drive, Maryville, MO 64468-6001

The Iris Murdoch Centre
The new building that is to be provided for the Dementia Services Development Trust on campus at the University of Stirling in Scotland is to be called The Iris Murdoch Centre in recognition of Dame Iris's work. John Bayley has given his permission for Dame Iris's name to be used.

The Iris Murdoch Centre will be a new centre of excellence that will pioneer work on improving the quality of life of dementia sufferers. It will provide a new home for the University's Dementia Services Development Centre whose research is showing that by communicating with people with dementia about how they feel, much can be done to make them feel more fulfilled. Some projects now underway at the centre involve writing, music and painting, and concentrate on the fact that the right frontal lobe of the brain - responsible for creativity – is often the last to be affected by dementia. The Iris Murdoch Centre will provide new insights into how dementia sufferers experience their illness and help find out the best ways to enable them to continue living a full and happy life for as long as possible. Such research will do a great deal to remove the stigma that clings to dementia.

Building the new Iris Murdoch Centre will cost £2m. So far, the Dementia Centre has managed to raise £1,700,000. If any members of The Iris Murdoch Society would like to support this memorial to Dame Iris, they should send donations to The Iris Murdoch Centre, The University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA, Scotland UK. The Iris Murdoch Society has donated £100 to the appeal.

Anne Rowe gave a Master Class on *The Bell*, on BBC Radio London Live on Sunday, 21 January 2001. The Master Class was given on "Word by Word", the station's Sunday Afternoon Arts Magazine Programme.

Jan Skinner taught "Seeking the Good: The Novels of Iris Murdoch" for the University of Oxford Department for Continuing Education as part of The Oxford Experience 2000; it will be set again for 2001. Two novels are considered in detail: *The Sea, The Sea* and *The Green Knight*.

George Soule has published an online essay, "Murdoch's Gift: *The Book and the Brotherhood's Narrator*," at www.acad.carleton.edu/curricular/ENGL/faculty/soule/murdochBandB.htm

Philippa Foot's book, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), will be reviewed in the next issue.

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The Iris Murdoch Society

The Iris Murdoch Newsletter is the publication of the Iris Murdoch Society, formed at the Modern Language Association convention in New York City in December 1986. It appears annually, offering a forum for short articles and notices, and keeping members of the society informed of new publications, symposia and other news that has a bearing on Iris Murdoch and her writings.

2000 Meeting of the Iris Murdoch Society:

The 2000 meeting of the Iris Murdoch society was held on Friday, February 25, 2000, following the Murdoch session at the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky. The topic for the next Twentieth-Century Literature Conference panel will be Iris Murdoch and the Painterly.

If you would like to join the Iris Murdoch society and automatically receive the Newsletter please contact:

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Treasurer's Report:
The Star Financial Bank Balance as of September 30· 1999, was $1057.00. The Balance as of December 5, 2000, is $1253.30. This balance reflects the following transactions: additions of $390.00 for membership and $21.30 for interest income; deduction of $215.00 for postage and mailing expenses.

The Iris Murdoch Society has a Balance of £350 in the Halifax Building Society, Kingston, Surrey, England.

Painting the Author: The Portrait of Iris Murdoch by Marie-Louise von Motesiczky

In Iris Murdoch's novel *The Book and the Brotherhood* the description of the remodelled interior of a formerly musty and old-fashioned house includes the mentioning of a series of artists: "The drawing room … was now painted a glowing aquamarine adorned with a huge scarlet abstract by de Kooning over the fireplace and two colourful conversation pieces by Kokoschka and Motesiczky."[1] While de Kooning and Kokoschka are generally known, many readers probably wonder who Motesiczky is. Indeed, it might be quite appropriate to call Marie-Louise von Motesiczky a "well-kept secret". Only a relatively small circle of people know the paintings of Motesiczky and a smaller circle still are aware of her connection with prominent figures like Iris Murdoch, the writer Elias Canetti or the anthropologist and poet Franz Baermann Steiner. The substantial body of works Motesiczky left at her death in 1996 includes striking portraits of all three. In particular Elias Canetti, who entertained a friendship with Motesiczky that lasted for more than fifty years, was a favourite if not an easy and often evasive subject for the artist (Motesiczky's *Portrait of Elias Canetti* of 1992 belongs to the National Portrait Gallery in London).

Marie-Louise von Motesiczky was not a prominent figure in the British art scene. Although the few solo exhibitions in England, for example at the Goethe Institute in London in 1985, were extremely well received by the press and substantially enlarged the number of admirers of her work in this country, it is fair to say that Motesiczky achieved the status of a widely accepted artist only in her native Austria. After several solo exhibitions a major retrospective at the Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere in Vienna in 1994 celebrated nearly seventy years of the artist's work. Her undisputed place in the canon of Austrian art was once again proved by her prominent inclusion in the exhibition *Jahrhundert der Frauen* at the Kunstforum in Vienna in 1999. Numerous paintings are in private collections all over the world and in several public collections, such as the Tate Gallery in London, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art in Amsterdam and the Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere.

Motesiczky's relative obscurity in this country can be attributed to several factors: her émigré status left her without the established network of professional support and her style of painting, a kind of Expressionism that was founded on her training with Max Beckmann, met with lack of interest. Furthermore, Motesiczky did not actively push her work into the public sphere, but rather was content with focusing on creating new art works. Her awareness and ambivalent evaluation of this fundamentally lonely situation that, however, might bear unique artistic possibilities is expressed in the following quotation: "In painting there was no confrontation. Isolation is a word. It sounds sad, but can also be something very beautiful. If isolation was good or bad, one can only know much later."[2]

One of the few people who attempted to increase Motesiczky's fame in England was Iris Murdoch. Her appreciation of and interest in Motesiczky's paintings span several decades and reach a climax in 1963 when Murdoch commissioned Motesiczky to paint her portrait. The history of this portrait will be explored here.

I

Marie-Louise von Motesiczky was born in Vienna in 1906. Her father Edmund, a gifted amateur cellist, died when she was only three. Her mother Henriette came from an extremely wealthy Jewish family of bankers, industrialists and scholars who played a vital role in the intellectual and artistic circles of Vienna, including the philosopher Franz Brentano and Robert von Lieben, the inventor of the amplifying valve. Motesiczky's grandmother Anna von Lieben was one of the earliest patients of Sigmund Freud and thus a crucial inspiration for the creation of psychoanalysis.

Having left school at the age of thirteen, Motesiczky continued her education privately, visiting art schools in Vienna, The Hague, Frankfurt and Paris before being accepted in Max Beckmann's master class at the Städelschule in Frankfurt in 1926/27. Beckmann, whom she had already met as a teenager, was to have a shaping influence on her art and also became a lifelong friend. During the following decade Motesiczky quietly practised her art in Vienna. When, in 1938, Hitler marched into Austria, Motesiczky, together with her mother, immediately left for Holland. Their flight would eventually take them to England the following year, where they settled in Amersham during the war. Motesiczky's brother Karl, who stayed on in Austria, managed to send on her paintings – as a result

[1] Iris Murdoch: *The Book and the Brotherhood*, London 1988, p. 536 f.

[2] "In der Malerei fehlte jede Konfrontation. Isolierung ist ein Wort. Es klingt traurig, kann aber auch etwas sehr Schönes sein. Ob die Isolierung gut oder schlecht war, weiß man erst viel später.": Marie-Louise von Motesiczky: Etwas über mich, in: Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, exh. cat., Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere, Vienna 1994, p. 13-16, here p.15.

some of the early works have survived. Karl subsequently became active in the resistance. During an attempt at smuggling refugees into Switzerland he was denounced and sent to Auschwitz, where he perished soon afterwards. After the war Motesiczky moved to London and eventually purchased a house in Hampstead, where she settled for the last thirty years of her life and continued to work steadily at her painting.

Besides Max Beckmann, Oskar Kokoschka, whom the Motesiczkys knew in Vienna and later frequently met in England, came to be a decisive influence on Motesiczky's work. Although she never studied with him, his constant encouragement and comments on her works gave her guidance and support. Yet, despite the presence of two such masters of modern German art, Motesiczky developed her own very distinctive style early on. The strongest works can be found among her portraits and self-portraits. The group of works depicting her mother, spanning some fifty years and comprising about twenty paintings and numerous drawings and sketches, is especially outstanding in its honesty and directness. Motesiczky faithfully chronicles her mother's descent into extreme old age – she lived to be 96 – with an empathy and boldness that sometimes seems almost brutal. The 1936 drawing *Hunting* (Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, London) shows a strong, matronly figure in a boat, involved in one of her favourite pastimes. Two decades later, the mother still presents an impressive, almost manly, pipe-smoking figure in *Henriette von Motesiczky* (1959, private collection, Switzerland). Here, the onset of old age can faintly be detected in the wearing of a wig, from which a few strands of hair have managed to escape. The painting *From Night into Day* of 1975 (Tate Gallery, London) shows the mother, now in her mid-nineties and almost completely bald, retiring in bed. Together with her hair she has lost all former energy. Only the whippet, a constant companion, provides a remnant from her hunting days. Finally, extreme helplessness exudes from the shrivelled body and almost childlike features of *Mother with Baton* of 1977 (Arts Council of Great Britain). Abstaining from beautification and idealisation and with a passion for truth, Motesiczky succeeds at boldly depicting her sitter "objectively" in all the consequences of old age.

II

Like Motesiczky and her mother, another pair of refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe sought shelter in Amersham in the early 1940s: Elias Canetti and his wife Veza. Soon a remarkable friendship developed between the painter and the couple. It was Elias Canetti who was to become a crucial influence on Motesiczky's life. Their long-lasting and intellectually extremely stimulating friendship survived the death of Veza and Canetti's subsequent founding of a family with his second wife Hera, although it was extremely painful for Motesiczky to come to terms with the fact that her hope of marrying Canetti eventually had to be buried.

It could also have been Canetti who introduced Marie-Louise von Motesiczky to Iris Murdoch, whom he had known for a number of years. When both women met for the first time is unknown, but was presumably in the mid 1950s. It is however certain that a lasting friendship developed. A postcard from 1986 still expresses Murdoch's curiosity about new paintings with the concise wish: "Wd like to see you and pictures!"[3]

An early climax of the relationship was the commission to paint the author's portrait. The *Portrait of Iris Murdoch* (see cover illustration), which belongs to St. Anne's College, Oxford, was completed in 1964. On the occasion of leaving St. Anne's in order to devote her time fully to her novels and becoming an honorary fellow of philosophy in 1963, Iris Murdoch commissioned Marie-Louise von Motesiczky to do a portrait of her. As a parting gift to the college, Murdoch was willing to pay the difference between the college's contribution and Motesiczky's normal fee. By that time, having just published her sixth novel, Murdoch had become a well-known and established figure on the British literary scene. She chose Motesiczky as an artist she personally admired and thought undervalued in this country. With this commission she hoped to help increase Motesiczky's reputation and make her more familiar to a wider audience: "I admire her work very much & I think she is not well enough known in England. (She has a big reputation in Austria where she originally comes from.)"[4]

Motesiczky portrayed Murdoch facing the viewer, the head turned to the right with an absent, dreamlike expression on her face and a slightly windblown air about her whole presence. Befittingly, she is seated before a background of an animated dark sea on which the prow of a ship can be made out, cutting diagonally across the picture plane. With the ship, the emblem of St. Anne's College, Motesiczky chose an accessory for the background that clearly defines its context and also marks the occasion the portrait was to commemorate. The idea for the general atmosphere of the painting and especially the sea setting seems to have been born during a night-time sea

[3]Iris Murdoch to Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, n.d. (July 1986): archive of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.

[4]Iris Murdoch to the Principal of St. Anne's College, Oxford, 25 June (1963): personal file, St. Anne's College, Oxford.

voyage to the continent where Motesiczky "saw wonderful things on deck. There the people really look the way I would love to have them in a portrait. Grey and green and black and only the heads illuminated. If only Iris had been sitting there!"[5]

Elias Canetti played a major role in the portrait's creation. In his correspondence with Murdoch in summer 1963 he helped negotiate the price on Motesiczky's behalf. Ordinarily, the painter would charge between £200 and £250 for a portrait at the time – she was, however, insisting on reducing the price. Murdoch was thrilled that the commission would be accepted and urged the painter to not lower the price too much. Sittings started in late August/early September 1963, after Murdoch had returned from a trip to Canada. They must have continued at irregular intervals well into 1964 – perhaps not as often as the artist would have liked. In between the sittings, Murdoch and Motesiczky met socially, a welcome opportunity for the painter to renew her recollection of Murdoch's features as in between sessions she tried to do her from memory. These "unaided" attempts sometimes proved very fruitful and even more satisfying than had the sitter been present: "I have managed to capture Iris much better by heart", Motesiczky wrote to Canetti on 4 November 1963.[6] Working without the sitter had made Motesiczky aware of the special nature of Murdoch's features: "she really has a very good face if one understands that she is a man and not a woman."[7] The finished portrait indeed does not dwell on Murdoch's feminine qualities and corresponds with a remark John Bayley made about his wife: "Iris in general was never 'female' at all, a fact for which I sometimes remembered to be grateful."[8] Elias Canetti supported the project wholeheartedly, yet he was also able to play tricks on the women. Once he created an awkward little episode, which took place during one of the sittings, and which Iris Murdoch noted down in her diary: "Last Thursday, with Marie-Louise, we were sitting quietly, she painting, when Canetti suddenly appeared through the door. He startled us both. (He did this on purpose of course). Then he made M-L show me the portrait."[9] Showing her paintings before she considered them finished was a veritable ordeal to Motesiczky – one, however, she was not able to escape this time. Little surprises like this, despite Canetti's general encouragement, probably did not help alleviate Motesiczky's anxiety about creating a good painting. In fact, this concern took precedence over every other worry (whether to do with housekeeping or financial matters), and the completion of the portrait did not prove to be an easy task. Motesiczky, who sometimes expressed doubts about her ability to produce a worthwhile work of art, took her task extremely seriously. In fact, the entire Motesiczky household wished to further the project. After an apparent disagreement between Canetti and Motesiczky, the artist's mother urged Canetti to make it up with her and restore peace to enable her daughter to complete the "so difficult responsible work".[10] While visiting a Beckmann exhibition in Germany in late autumn 1963 and reading a line from her teacher's diaries on the troublesome business of portraiture – "I think I will not paint another portrait. No. No one thanks you for it and it never turns out the way you want it"[11] – Motesiczky drew some consolation and courage from the fact that, apparently, even the revered Beckmann had not always coped easily with the tricky task.

Just as some of Motesiczky's other commissioned portraits did not find approval, the reception of *Portrait of Iris Murdoch* was ambiguous. One viewer, for example, allegedly mistook the ship for an aeroplane crashing into the sea. Marjorie Reeves, who frequently passed the portrait hanging outside the Senior Common Room at St. Anne's, found it a "powerful portrait" but felt that the overall "ship-wrecked" appearance of the sitter did not capture the various aspects of Murdoch's personality adequately.[12] Helen Lessore, Motesiczky's London dealer at the time, was considering exhibiting the painting in a forthcoming exhibition of portraits at the Beaux Arts Gallery. On inspection she found the background too decorative and urged Motesiczky to repaint it. "Iris's head itself she

[5]"wunderbare Sachen gesehen am Deck. Da sehen die Leute eigentlich so aus wie ich sie gerne auf einem Porträt hätte. Grau u. grün und schwarz und nur die Köpfe beleuchtet. Wenn da die Iris gesessen wäre!": Marie-Louise von Motesiczky to Elias Canetti, 6 November 1963: archive of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.
[6]"Iris hab ich auswendig … besser getroffen": archive of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.
[7]"eigentlich hat sie ein sehr gutes Gesicht wenn man versteht dass sie ein Mann u. keine Frau ist.": Marie-Louise von Motesiczky to Elias Canetti, 4 November 1963: archive of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.
[8]John Bayley: *Iris. A Memoir of Iris Murdoch*, London 1998, p. 59.
[9]Iris Murdoch: unpublished diary, entry 16 February([1964), kindly made available by Peter Conradi.
[10]"so schwere verantwortungsvolle Arbeit": Henriette von Motesiczky to Elias Canetti, 2 December 1963: archive of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.
[11]"ich glaube ich male kein Porträt mehr. Nein. Es ist so undankbar und es wird doch nie so wie man will.": quoted in Marie-Louise von Motesiczky to Elias Canetti, 6 November 1963: archive of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.
[12]Marjorie Reeves to Ines Schlenker, 18 June 2000: archive of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.

considers to be one of my very best heads."[13] Murdoch herself, who saw the portrait after Canetti's intervention when it was nearly completed, found it uncannily accurate. She noted in her diary: "I think it is wonderful, terrible, so sad and frightening, me with the demons. How did she know?"[14]

In *Portrait of Iris Murdoch*, as in so many of her other works, Motesiczky succeeds in relating to her sitter sympathetically. As an intensive observer of her surroundings, Motesiczky creates portraits that are extremely honest – and sometimes seemingly crude – depictions of her sitters. The likeness intended and thus achieved is less physical and more psychological, the portrait capturing the sitter's true identity and spirit. One of Murdoch's fictional characters, Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince*, might have commented: "All art deals with the absurd and aims at the simple. Good art speaks truth, indeed *is* truth, perhaps the only truth."[15]

Ines Schlenker
The Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust
2001

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"Did Iris Murdoch Draw from Life ?"

The novelist Iris Murdoch always argued that drawing from life was taboo. She wanted to invent, not copy. Yet central characters in her first two novels were, her journals show, certainly drawn from life.

Her first novel *Under the Net* contains a wise fool called Hugo Belfounder, who cuts through the narrator Jake Donaghue's illusions about who-loves-whom. Hugo also awakens in Jake both humility and a sense of wonder. The novel concerns a re-enchantment of the ordinary, a re-christening of the eyes. And Hugo, her journals leave no doubt about the matter, is a portrait of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's star-pupil from 1937, Yorick Smythies. He was often the only person allowed to take notes in Wittgenstein's lectures. Murdoch's friendship with Smythies prospered after her return to teach at St Anne's College in 1948. "What a poor image of Yorick Hugo Belfounder is! But this is unkind to Hugo. The fault is mine", Iris noted in her journal. Smythies resembled a cross between Hamlet and the grave-digger, thin, stooped, myopic, tall, pure-of-heart, given to the slow catechising that Wittgenstein favoured as a method of investigation, and to strange abstinences. At the age of five he put a sign on his door reading, "Do not disturb: reading Plotinus".

Close friends use of him the same phrase as Iris of Hugo: he was "totally truthful", to the point of wild eccentricity. Like Hugo, Yorick in real life was divided between two women-loves. Like Hugo, who ends apprenticed to a Nottingham watch-maker, Yorick wished to become a bus conductor but, Iris noted, was the only person in the history of the bus company to fail the theory test. They muddled him with complex situations so that he could not give the correct change. When he accidentally pressed part of the ticket-punching gadget which conductors wore around their necks, "great sausages" of rolled-up tickets came spewing out. During his single driving-lesson the instructor left the car as Yorick drove on and off the pavement.

Though Iris in 1977 wrote to her publisher, Chatto and Windus, pleading for a philosophical work by Yorick to be taken seriously by them, his only known publication is a review of Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, a book he feared would encourage slip-shod thinking. He lived mainly as a librarian. Wittgenstein 's testimonial for him for this job is a warm one.

Yorick for Iris was a wise counsellor, quick, sensitive, humorous, an excellent listener. He was a Catholic convert and a pacifist. A record of conversations with Yorick, kept by his friend Peter Daniel from 1952, at the time Murdoch was writing him into *Under the Net*, makes clear Yorick's wide culture, his wholly original views, his religious passion, his belief that ordinary consciousness is unfree since enslaved to sin, his attraction to Buddhism

[13]"Den Iris Kopf selbst findet sie einen meiner allerbesten Köpfe.": Marie-Louise von Motesiczky to Elias Canetti, 30 April 1964: archive of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust.
[14]Iris Murdoch: unpublished diary, entry 16 February (1964), kindly made available by Peter Conradi. For more about these demons see M.Reeve, BBC *Book Mark*, 1989.
[15]Iris Murdoch: *The Black Prince*, London 1999, p. 11.

(when a film of *Under the Net* was discussed in 1956, Iris proposed to simplify the philosophy by making this Buddhist), his preoccupation with the question of saintliness. He believed in human "transformation". He wished we had recorded conversations between a saint and an ordinary worldly person. Saints, though suffering, were still happy. He found *The Cloud of Unknowing* helpful. He was not so unworldly as to be unable to see that many Oxford dons were bored and jealous. He took snuff.

When he died in 1980, Murdoch wrote his death into the novel she was then composing, *The Philosopher's Pupil,* where Hugo leaves his clocks to "that writer-chap" - in other words to Jake Donaghue. Before this he suffered a schizophrenic breakdown, which caused him to hide behind trees, making strange utterances ("Soft soap"; "Heil Hitler"). The kindest and most charitable Christians he met were his fellow-inmates in the mental hospital.

Iris shared Smythies's concern with sin and saintliness, and his love of the great mystics, also of Kafka, and Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji*. Yorick helped Iris through a number of emotional crises. In July 1953, after completing the novel, she rowed Yorick Smythies in her canoe - her Oxford flat backed on to a canal - as far as The Plough at Wolvercote:

> …a long conversation in which Y was more like Hugo than it's possible to imagine. A diary couldn't but be "a lie". All art was a lie. Only the Bible was not a fabrication. Chaucer, Dante? Perhaps Chaucer was all right... I said, some people's trade is writing, & if it's possible to sin in it, this doesn't differentiate it from any other trade. Y. said - it's different because it involves judging. He agreed later perhaps this only differentiated it from simple manual jobs. All others were "tainted" in some similar way! I said too - there must be people who try to purify ideas & speech. You advocate some terrible dichotomy - tainted speech or silence.

In *Under the Net* Jake writes up such conversations with Hugo as a pretentious dialogue called *The Silencer*; while Anna Quentin, who loves Hugo, creates an equally silent Mime theatre in Hammersmith as a result of his influence. Being pure-of-heart and nobly un-self-conscious, Hugo, who lives without self-image, is unable to recognise these reflections.

In Murdoch's second novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter,* there is another philosopher-king named, for his cunning, Mischa Fox. He is based upon Elias Canetti, the book's dedicatee, with whom Murdoch began a passionate liaison in January 1953 that was lastingly important to her and to her art. He was born in Ruschuk in Bulgaria in 1905, with Ladino, the medieval Spanish spoken by Sephardi Jews, his first language. His intense pride in this patrician inheritance marked a life rich in further displacements. His polyglot merchant father moved the family to Didsbury, Manchester, from 1911, where he learned English and French; at the age of eight, in Vienna, his gifted, possessive mother obliged him with a fiercely cruel singleness of will, in weeks, to learn German.

At the time that Iris met Canetti, his habits of working late at night, then moving nomadically – "as if hunted" - between a variety of neatly book-lined safe-houses, including a seedy flat at 14 Crawford Street and another in Compayne Gardens belonging to his official mistress Marie-Louise von Motesiczky but used by his wife Veza, were well-established. He visited friends separately and kept them apart, living a double, sometimes a triple life, holding court in the coffee-shops of Hampstead, which recreated a lost "Mittel-Europa". When Iris was asked how he fitted his wife into his busy round of visits, she replied airily, "Oh, he sees her at 4 in the afternoon". Both Canetti and Veza insisted she be treated with all the respect due to a Wife Number One in a classical Chinese household : "Canetti can have as many mistresses as he likes, I don't care, for I am Veza Canetti, and no one else can call themselves that".

Canetti's 1935 novel *Die Blendung* was translated during the war and published to acclaim in 1946 as *Auto-da-Fé.* Susan Sontag's brilliant championing of his work, she was assured, later helped win him the Nobel Prize for Literature. She noted that it was impossible not to regard the derangement of its monomaniac hero, the book-man Kien, as other than a variation on his author's most cherished exaggerations. His novel is animated by an exceptionally inventive, delirious hatred of women. Canetti's mother predicted that women would worship him for its misogyny; an accurate prediction.

Canetti, an acclaimed writer and accomplished listener, attracted what Murdoch called "apostles" or - like Fox – "creatures". He arrived in London in 1939 knowing no one. Ten years later he consorted with painters, cabinet ministers, sculptors, intellectuals, film actresses. There were hostess-patrons - the author Gladys Huntingdon, with whose family off Hyde Park he at first lived; Diana Spearman on Lord North St, associated with the periodical *Time and Tide*; Flora Solomon in Mayfair, once mistress to Kerensky. The artist Milein Cosman and her husband the musicologist Hans Keller were neighbours and friends of Canetti. So were the writers Bernice Rubens and Rudi Nassauer. Gwenda David, literary "scout" for Viking, lived nearby; so did Clement Glock, who painted scenery at Covent Garden, and her husband William Glock, future head of music at the BBC. The poet

Kathleen Raine and the brothers Gavin and Sir Aymer Maxwell were other "apostles". Aymer and Flora Solomon probably helped support Canetti financially. It was Aymer who first called him, "The Master". Gavin Maxwell said "None of us needs Canetti as much as Canetti needs us". As at court, not everyone stayed in favour. One friend commented: "He ruled over both men and women".

He could be intensely secretive. He had lived part-time for eleven years with his second wife and baby daughter in Zurich before his long-term London mistress of thirty years, the painter Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, learnt of the extent of the change in his situation. He was also jealous, paranoiac, and a mythomaniac who, in the words of one friend, "loved creating and undoing human relations and toying with people, watching their relations as a scientist might watch his white mice". What is most disturbing in Canetti often rests on a confusion of life and literature. He seemed to belong inside a novel, as when he claimed that the English bored him, because they were "not wicked enough". Raine observed that he had "studied evil more closely" than she, that he had "specialised in it". She also saw him as a puppet-master who lacked any sense of the sacred, and thought himself invisible. Not for nothing are the characters in *Auto-da-Fé* tormented worms.

Canetti's qualities, positive and negative, are so contradictory that it is hard to see how they belong within the same person. It is no accident that, when Murdoch portrayed him in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, she gave him eyes of different colours and then, to boot, divided him into two: cunning Mischa Fox, effortlessly superior and god-like, and Calvin Blick, his Smerdyakov-like double, manipulative and wicked. Iris Murdoch remarked early in 1953 to Canetti, "Whatever I shall do you will have foreseen it and understood it even before I have myself". This sentence gets echoed in - and embodied in the very title of - *The Flight from the Enchanter*: the leaves that appear to be fleeing from Shelley's West Wind are in fact driven by that wind, "like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing".

Mischa Fox's only public act of power consists in his buying up the Suffragette paper *The Artemis*. The novel itself never explains why, though Fox is described as "not, to put it mildly, a supporter of female emancipation".

It is the main point of *The Flight from the Enchanter* that those enslaved to Mischa Fox - men as well as women - are enslaved voluntarily. The "alien god" can rule only because his creatures surrender their will. As Virginia Woolf once noted, "Hitlers are bred by slaves". The karmic "blame" of power is in Murdoch's view thus shared between bully and victim; it rests on an act of collusion, and the victims of power, as she expressed this in *The Unicorn*, are "infected" too, passing on the virus to others.

This final draft was finished in February 1955, when Murdoch was increasingly drawn to her future husband John Bayley and her relations with Canetti were unresolved. Fox's power is literally inexplicable. If there is a literary parallel, it is Thomas Mann's 1931 short story "Mario the Magician", an anti-Hitlerite fable where a conjuror-hypnotist bewitches his audience, and the voluntary enslavement of that audience is as blame-worthy as the manipulations of the Magician himself.

No one knows Fox's age, what country he comes from, or can fathom his apparent omniscience. Rainborough stands in for all Fox's "creatures" in asking anxiously, "Did he say anything about me ?" Annette, like the younger Iris, positively wills her enslavement to him, suffering the illusion that she can thereby "liberate [his] soul from captivity"; while Rosa, like an older and wiser Iris, dislikes his assertions of power and finds the "strength to flee...the demon". Nina, whose name echoes Canetti's wife Veza's, captive to her fear of him, finally escapes, not to Australia as she plans, but by throwing herself out of the window to her death. It is an important part of the novel's truthfulness that Fox's power is ceded to him by his creatures, who will their own enslavement. Both parties are complicit. Such an analysis of power runs through Murdoch's oeuvre.

The Flight from the Enchanter opens with a meditation on the vulnerability of all monsters. Annette thinks of Dante's poor condemned minotaur in the twelfth canto of *The Inferno*: "Why should the poor minotaur be suffering in hell?" He hadn't asked to be born a monster. This softens our judgement on Mischa Fox: monsters deserve our pity. The inward nature of that protective anxiety which Fox (like Canetti) recorded especially about the fate of animals is closely examined in the novel. In *The Human Province* Canetti asked why animals suffer death: "What is their original sin?" The worst we know of Mischa Fox, reputed to cry when reading the newspapers, is that when a boy he killed a kitten. He comments, " If the gods kill us, it is not for their sport, but because we fill them with such intolerable compassion, a sort of nausea".

Canetti's own writings are also memorable when encountering what is maimed or not whole - the anonymous human sack at the end of *The Voices of Marrakesh* that produces a single note ; the young paralyzed cripple Thomas Marek whose mother pushes him around on a wagon, whom he befriends near Vienna in his *Memoirs*. He liked to rescue those "*in extremis*". Here a bird with only one foot (in real life sighted by Iris with the ancient historian Arnoldo Momigliano at Kew) fascinates Mischa. How will it manage in a storm ? *The Flight from the Enchanter* examines the connections between pity and power, and between sentimentality and cruelty. Rainborough is predator to Annette, victim to Agnes Casement; but most play both victim and predator. Only Peter

Saward and Annette's mother stand outside the web of enslavement, which reaches one comic apogee in the persecutions the old Suffragette Mrs Wingfield visits on her companion Miss Foy: "Would you say old Foy was a virgin?… She isn't!" Agnes Casement too, who nearly swallows Rainborough whole, shows Iris Murdoch's consistent refusal ever to depict women purely as victims.

Fox is a mystery-man whom, since Canetti was then poor, Iris Murdoch disguises as wealthy; also wealth can fascinate as a power-source. We forget that he is a newsaper magnate. The point is never developed. He is given Canetti's moustache, and also one blue and one brown eye, pointing to a divided and double nature, and is "famous for being famous". Much is merely stated of him: that he is "capable of enormous cruelty", that the "sight of little independent things annoys him", as he wants them in his power. He is capable of taking a careful revenge after ten years. He has collected around London "dozens of enslaved beings" waiting to do his will whom, as Saward observes, he drives mad. His parties are carefully constructed plots for the forcing of various dramas. Dragon-like, he eats up young girls and, for Rosa, is sometimes the "very figure of evil.

The best scene has him arriving unannounced at Rainborough's when the latter in panic has shut away young Annette, bare-breasted, in a cupboard. Fox talks, with a poetry both sinister and interminable, about the protean and malleable nature of women and their need to be broken; his malice, both towards Rainborough whose predicament he surely intuits, and towards women, is comical and disturbing. Fox takes pleasure in disquieting others.

The crisis of the novel, also both funny and sinister, is a Dostoevskian skandal, a party in Mischa's palazzo where a gold-fish bowl gets smashed and a fish, by mistake, "saved" in a decanter of gin. His inviting Agnes Casement is typical of Canetti, who was adept both at discovering his friends' secrets, and also of paying attention in social gatherings to the least probable guest.

Murdoch solves the aesthetic problem that Canetti/Fox is morally mixed, at a time when she was in thrall to Canetti, by giving Fox a wicked double, Calvin Blick, who is "the dark half of Mischa Fox's mind. That's how Mischa can be so innocent". Blick argues that reality "is a cipher with many solutions, all of them right ones", a view recalled as close to Canetti's, and is opposed in this foggy relativism by the good Peter Saward, who argues on the final page by contrast for a humble striving towards truths which may be unreachable.

Hitler, mentioned once only, who killed those he had rendered piteous by uprooting, is a real presence. When Fox asks Peter whether he does not feel that everything in the universe requires his protection, "Even this matchbox", Peter demurs, observing how close in Mischa lie the springs of pity and of cruelty.

When Rosa flees from Mischa in Italy towards the end of *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Iris Murdoch was enacting her own symbolic liberation from Canetti, one which in real life she had not yet, when completing composition in early 1955, achieved. This took one further calendar year. The objectivity she could display in her fiction was something she had not achieved in her life. Hence, precisely, one value to her of her art.

These two philosopher-kings - Hugo and Fox - differ in their relation to their apostles. Anna and Jake - both based on Iris herself - are Hugo's chief or only disciples. Perhaps like Yorick Smythies, Hugo lacks any self-image and cannot grasp that Anna and Jake are his disciples. Mischa Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter* by contrast influences everyone except Peter Saward, whose immunity to Fox's power-broking is a leading sign of his virtue. Mischa wishes everyone into a subordinate relation with him, and recognises only disciples. While Hugo/Yorick refused a life-myth, Fox/Canetti is a mythomaniac. Hugo suspected narrative and stories and feared their ambiguous power; Fox/Blick revels in the relativity of stories.

Canetti appeared to be proud of Iris and would often claim to have been her discoverer. But if he helped 'make' her a writer, it was not quite in the manner that he assumed. Canetti, in some guise, is present within or behind every male enchanter-figure of Murdoch's novels, including the erotic puppet-master Julius in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and the jealous, rapacious tyrannical Charles Arrowby in her Booker-prize-winning *The Sea, The Sea.*

Peter J. Conradi
December 2001

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Extracts from the introduction to *Conversations with Iris Murdoch* compiled and edited by Gillian Dooley (University of South Carolina Press, Spring 2003)

The great critic Frank Kermode , Iris Murdoch's exact contemporary, whose brief but essential interview is included in this collection, once wrote that her novel *Bruno's Dream* was "disappointing only by the fantastically high standards it contrives to suggest."[1] Indeed, as a novelist, she was always an idealist, and her artistic ambitions reflected the modified Platonism which her philosophical works espoused. Her idealism, however, was equaled by her humility, which continually shines forth in these interviews. It was essential for her to aim for high ideals – the creation of free, independent characters in a realistic social setting – however far away she felt she was from attaining them. As she said in 1964, "Any novelist worth his salt knows very clearly what is wrong with his work before it is ever published: why else, after all, would he be writing his next novel except to correct in it the mistakes of his last?"

These interviews have a unique place in the study of Murdoch's life and work. Although she often wrote about literature in her essays, she never discussed her own work, so interviews are particularly precious: a skilful interviewer could prompt her to talk about very specific aspects of her novels. But the dynamic nature of conversation poses inbuilt dangers to its reliability. Where there appears to be sympathy between Murdoch and the interviewer, she is perhaps more likely to answer questions openly and without constraint, but there may also be an element of wishing to please, or not to offend, the interviewer. Modesty does not prevent her from making it clear, politely but with occasional asperity, that she finds her interviewer's approach unsympathetic – when Barbara Stevens Heusel applies Bakhtinian theory to her novels, for example, or when Stephen Glover suggests that "there is something too middle-class about the modern English novel." However, the slight antagonism in these cases may itself influence her responses, giving her opinions unwarranted emphasis. Thus some of the apparent contradictions which arise from time to time on topics like the role of philosophy in her novels might result only from different responses to different interviewers.

On the whole, Murdoch was a courteous and co-operative interviewee. Only once did she refuse outright to answer a question: Haffenden asked her to give an example of one of her dreams, and she replied, "I don't think I will." More often she seemed preoccupied – as if she were still dwelling on an earlier question, and responded to a new one absently before amplifying an earlier answer. A frustrating example occurred during a discussion of *The Black Prince* with Jack Biles. He proposed that "there is no way in the world to know what really did happen. Which is what you were aiming for," and Murdoch replied, "Yes, yes," and continued, "I should say just one thing about this matter of symbolism …" This not only contradicts other statements, such as that made to Bigsby – "The thing is *The Black Prince* has got its own inbuilt mode of explanation" – but goes against a consistent belief in the stability of truth, especially in a work of art, which "must have authority over its victim, or client or whatever you can call the person who is meeting it." Occasionally the way she answered, or did not answer, a question changed the direction of the discussion. Bellamy, for example, asked her about one aspect of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* – the connection between art and morality – but she replied with an explanation of the "theological myth" underlying the novel, which did not address his question directly at all.

Despite these reservations, however, these interviews, taken in context, give a clear overall picture of Murdoch's beliefs on a wide range of topics, and her intentions and techniques as a writer. Many of her opinions remained stable over the years – although one must bear in mind that fame with its consequent media and academic attention came to her relatively late in life: her first novel was published when she was 35, and the first interview included here was conducted in 1962 when she was 43. By then, youthful infatuation with Marxism was long past, and her left-leaning views were becoming more moderate. In 1962 she told Hobson that she was a member of the Labour Party, although she disagreed with its education policy: "one doesn't necessarily support a party because of its record or because of very explicit things in its policy. One may support it because in general it has good sense and goodwill about things one thinks matter." Even this qualified approval for the Labour Party had disappeared by the late 1980s, and she admitted to having voted Conservative: "Margaret Thatcher's government has done a number of good things," she told Rosemary Hartill in 1989.

She was fairly constant in her belief that the novel was not the place for expression of social or political comment: she told both Rose and Bellamy that she felt plays were better vehicles for propaganda than novels. Her two plays *The Three Arrows* and *The Servants and the Snow* are indeed more political in nature than her novels, although she also claimed in the Bellamy interview that "in a quiet way, there is a lot of social criticism in my novels." Strong political and social beliefs usually underlie a desire for justice, which she seems not to have had: she

[1] Frank Kermode, "Bruno's Dream" in *Iris Murdoch*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelasea House, 1986): 25.

told Hartill that "the concept to hang on to is truth . Let justice look after itself;" she regarded a desire for revenge as "the opposite of freedom." Satire , that vehicle of the political propagandist, has little place in her work, and when Heusel asked Murdoch whether she considered herself a satirist she was predictably answered in the negative.

One subject on which Murdoch's views were forthright was women's education , although where other aspects of the feminist movement were concerned she was less than supportive. She said to Bellamy, "I'm not interested in women's problems as such, though I'm a great supporter of women's liberation – particularly education for women – but in aid of getting women to join the human race, not in aid of making any kind of feminine contribution to the world." At the French symposium, she asserted, "I disapprove of 'separatism' as a mode of liberation: women's studies , black studies , and nonsense of that sort." It might be noted, however, in her novels, that women are often depicted in the very feminine predicament of being controlled, enslaved or even imprisoned by the will of egotistical males. Jo Brans brought this matter up, citing as examples Hannah in *The Unicorn*, Dorina in *An Accidental Man*, Crystal in *A Word Child*, and Hartley in *The Sea, The Sea*. Murdoch understandably protested that there were significant differences between these cases ; but Brans certainly had a point – men are less likely to be enslaved in this way by women in Murdoch's fiction.

One of the questions most commonly asked in these interviews concerns the relationship between Murdoch's philosophy and her fiction and, although her answers often seem contradictory, she consistently rejected the title of "philosophical novelist." For example, Hobson asked in 1962, "Do you express a philosophy in your novels?" and she replied, "In the strict sense, certainly no. But having thought about philosophy, especially moral philosophy, does sometimes affect the way I set a problem up in a novel." Rose brought up the question of the double career in 1968, and she commented that "more philosophy seems to be getting into the novels," but in 1977 she told Biles, "I don't want philosophy, as such, to intrude into the novel world at all and I think it doesn't. I find really no difficulty in separating these activities. I mention philosophy sometimes in the novels because I happen to know about it, just as another writer might talk about coal mining; it happens to come in." Talking to Meyers in 1988 she said: "The consideration of moral issues in the novels may be intensified by some philosophical considerations, but on the whole I think it's dangerous writing a philosophical novel." Her position was a little ambiguous – on the one hand that philosophy was a subject like coal-mining (she mentioned coal-mining to Glover and Hartill as well as Biles as one of the subjects she would have liked to know about as a novelist), but on the other hand that it was a basic element of her "moral orientation" and as such naturally affected her fictional writing. It is certainly an important feature of her work that, as she said in the 1978 French symposium, in a novel "one sees the moral problem in a real context." Her novels are full of theorists whose theories fail when tested against reality, Rupert in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* being perhaps the clearest example.

The final two pieces in this book show her at the beginning and end of her decline into Alzheimer's disease, which I refrain from calling tragic – she would not have approved of this word to describe such a contingent state of affairs. Joanna Coles visited the North Oxford house in September 1996, before the disease was diagnosed, or at least publicly acknowledged, and found Murdoch in what she herself described as "a very, very bad, quiet place." And Robert Weil, John Bayley's American editor, very movingly describes her in her last few years – still sweet-tempered in spite of her mental deterioration. These two pieces necessarily include John Bayley, and testify to the devotion to his wife which is so evident in his two books, *Elegy for Iris* and *Iris and Her Friends.*

But, as Weil points out, to pay too much attention to Murdoch's last years would be "a horrendous trivialization of a remarkable career," and I hope this collection will help to focus attention on that career, a life spent aspiring to the courage and truthfulness which, she told Meyers, are the characteristics of all great art.

Gillian Dooley
2001

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Review: *Iris Murdoch A Life* by Peter J.Conradi. (London: Harper Collins 2001. 597 pp. £24.99.)

Two main themes seem to me to emerge from this almost excessively vast and various volume. One is Iris Murdoch's lifelong ambivalence between her early, simple world-view and her later recognition of greater complexity. As Conradi puts it –

> It could be said that all her fiction, and much of her moral philosophy, are acts of penance for, and attacks upon, the facile rationalistic optimism of her extreme youth, when she thought that setting people free was easy, that "socialism (of which we had no very clear idea) would bring freedom and justice to all countries, and the world would get better". This optimism entailed a belief in the imminent birth of a "clean-cut, rational world" within the century dominated by Hitler and Stalin. Her work explores, among other matters, those "irrational" psychic forces within the individual which make Hitlers possible, and freedom problematic (78).

The other is her involvement with drama - the way in which this ongoing war between her earlier and later self often led her to treat real life as a play involving conflicts between a number of personae, and also to shape her novels as if they were unresolved conflicts in real life.

Her tendency to dramatise her personal life was something she was aware of. It often disturbed her. Yet she saw its important function. Thus she wrote in 1947 –

> Urge towards drama is fundamental. I am "full of representations of myself" (see Ruysbroek). Need for self-expression, to speak, may seem to conflict…*I am using novels to slough off my lesser selves – instead of a means to self-knowledge and greater inwardness*. Hence my "moral vulgarity".
>
> The escape from drama? (Need of not drifting away from politics.) In love. In simple relations with people…. Drama besets me – when alone often, walking along road etc. This corrupts my inner life…. What goes on in my head is 4/5 unnecessary or bad. Fantasies, self-pity, self-torture…(Emphasis mine)

It is surely true that the urge towards drama is fundamental for all thought, indeed for all life. The conflict between different elements within us is what shows us the need to choose. It is what makes discussion of our choices possible. And personifying those elements is a natural, perhaps to some extent a necessary move. We naturally reason in dialogue.

But the downside of this habit - for thought - is that it can make us simplify the conflict into a pattern of black-and-white, us-and-them. It can lead us to dismiss the intermediate positions that could lead to a reconciliation. For example, denouncing four-fifths of what goes on in one's head as unnecessary or bad, rather than listening to it and taking it seriously, is surely a recipe for extremism. It is not surprising to me that the person who wrote these words – when she became disillusioned with the Labour Party – didn't just abstain from voting but voted for Mrs Thatcher.

For personal life, however, the effect of a strong urge towards drama is naturally rather more serious. As soon as more than one person is involved, the question "whose plot are we going to follow?" becomes important. There is, I think, no doubt that among intellectuals in the post-war epoch, especially in Existentialism, the insistence on one's own plot at all costs – an insistence known as "authenticity" – enjoyed huge prestige, being seen as a triumph of freedom, a righteous conquest of courage over convention.

Iris was, of course, well aware of the clash between this kind of theatricality and other ideals. She often treated that clash profoundly. Conradi points out that, `for that reason… her picturing of Sartre became increasingly deadly' (272). And in *The Sovereignty of Good* she resoundingly debunked the romanticisation of freedom.

All the same, her own life did remain remarkably theatrical. Readers of this biography are indeed quite likely to think at some point, "Why, this is getting like an Iris Murdoch novel". The story is hard to follow because, just when you think you have grasped the situation and got to know the people, a quite new factor that you weren't told about drops in. The whole scene is transformed. And this happens, not just once, but repeatedly.

I have always connected this kind of dissociation in Iris's books with a peculiarity which all of us who knew her well were aware of – namely, that we did not know her well at all, because she kept her various friends in separate boxes, never really telling one set about another. Conradi associates this trait with a similar one in her lover Elias Canetti –

> Both Iris and Canetti were secretive, leading complicated private lives, keeping friends and lovers in compartments. "Holding them and yet hurling them away. A sort of solar system. Until they are suspended at a certain distance by a force of gravity. Until they find an orbit", [as she wrote in her journal in 1953] could describe either Canetti or herself. Both had within them, as well as warmth and vulnerability, that ice-splinter without which art is not made. Both were highly attractive to others and neither always told the truth…. She lamented, "that I have told lies to all those I loved most deeply, not once but continually". (373)

Probably most of this lying involved selective silence rather than actual deception. But it is quite true, of course, that this habit does involve a certain detachment – a kind of distance from others into which Iris had probably drifted during her early life as an only child. What is puzzling about it in her case is that she was not actually a social cannibal, which is what people who act like this usually are. She was never systematically exploitative, as Canetti, Thomas Balogh and several other major figures in her life seem to have been. It was just that she chose to carry on close relations with a large number of people at the same time and have affairs with a number of them. In doing this without being essentially destructive she was, I am sure, a most unusual kind of person.

However, this way of arranging life inevitably does lead to a good deal of trouble, as this biography shows. Those of us who don't try to do it are, of course, liable to think that it clearly can't work at all. It looks like putting too many horses on a race-course. Naturally they are going to collide. But to the Existentialist age it looked like simply saying "Yes" to every challenge rather than ducking out of it. It all depends on your point of view.

When Iris and I were undergraduates studying philosophy, I mentioned to her once that Aristotle says you can't be in love with more than one person at a time. "Why on earth not?" she shouted, really indignant at such intolerance. It struck me afterwards that, for Aristotle, "being in love" simply meant being totally occupied by a single loved person. The proposition seemed to him obvious. He was not making some puritanical reforming proposal but merely following ordinary usage. And he brought the matter up in the rather interesting context of asking how many friends it was possible to have. He remarked that, since getting to know somebody well inevitably takes time, there really is a limit on the number of one's possible friends. Time is so short. Then, as an obvious illustration, he adds, "just as it is not possible to be in love with more than one person at a time".

What is (again) puzzling about Iris here is that she managed to have a quite extraordinary number of friends as well as lovers, not by going about with a fixed smile but by genuinely responding to so many people – by being open to them. And this openness did not die out, as it so often does, with age. Some ten years back I remember ringing her suddenly to ask if I could visit her. "Well, I'm going to Japan this afternoon," she answered, "but yes, do come in this morning, how lovely, hurrah!" and we had a really relaxed conversation.

In this way, she had acquired during her long life an extraordinary number of real friends. That fact sets a problem to her biographer. Is he to try to put everybody in? Or is he to pick out the main lines in the story and just give brief indications of the rest as background?

I have to say that I wish myself that he had taken the second course. I think that even the main lines of Iris's life were quite complicated enough for one book, and the further details make it hard to follow them. In the latter years particularly – as happens with many contemporary biographies – readers can get the impression of being at a huge party where they are introduced successively to an awful lot of people whom they aren't ever going to see again. The upside of this, if one can persevere, is that there are still a great many good stories. Also, of course, future researchers will doubtless find all this detail a gold mine.

In the earlier part, however, I think that Conradi discusses very well the central issues of her life – her relation with the Communist Party, with the war, with Ireland, with Frank Thompson and Donald MacKinnon and other crucial figures, including her parents. He does not say much about her philosophy. My own impression is that this side of her thought would have developed much more freely if she had not been inhibited by a somewhat narrow and destructive phase in the philosophical atmosphere both at Oxford and Cambridge, and I always regretted that she did not develop further the ideas she expressed in *The Sovereignty of Good*.

As things turned out, however, she put most of her ideas into her novels. Here Conradi makes many interesting speculations about the meaning of her plots and the relation between various fictional incidents and events in her life – topics which will surely occupy plenty of other scholars. He is himself a sensitive and serious

critic who takes endless trouble to follow the subtleties of her thought. He constantly insists on fairly displaying both sides in the many disputes that she carried on with her various selves, and thereby with elements in the changing world around her. He shows the tremendous energy with which she confronted and considered that world. This book is clearly a labour of love and I think it does full justice to its subject.

Mary Midgley
2001

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Review: *The Saint and the Artist: A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* by Peter J. Conradi Third edition. (Harper Collins: London, 2001)

The Saint and the Artist was first published in 1986. Iris Murdoch's productivity tended to outstrip criticism and a second edition came out in 1989. The third and presumably final edition brings the account of Murdoch's work up to her tragic descent into Alzheimer's disease, adding short descriptions of her last three novels. The book has also been slightly reorganized so that some arguments are more clearly presented. In the interval between the second and third editions Conradi has also brought out a collection of Murdoch's essays, *Existentialists and Mystics,* and written her biography. He reports in the preface that his study of her life has not substantially changed his view of her work, quoting Murdoch's convenient wartime observation: "It is not what one has experienced but what one *does* with what one has experienced that matters."

The virtues of the book are as they were. The dialectic between the (broadly defined) characters of the "saint" and the "artist" runs through Murdoch's work. The saint distrusts fiction and fantasy, is relatively free of egotism and even self-image, lives by rules, can be personally unattractive, boring, clumsy, inarticulate and tends to be unlucky in love. The artist, usually a painter or writer but sometimes a dramatist with the lives of others, is self-absorbed, imaginative and also morally creative, frequently to destructive effect. The artist is more "interesting", a suspect term in Murdoch's moral lexicon. But the dialogue remains open. The novelist cannot, like the guardians of Plato's nowhere-republic, finally dismiss the poets.

Conradi does not, however, ride one thesis through the book. Indeed, major strengths of this study are its openness, expansiveness and range of reference. Murdoch is a learned and allusive writer and Conradi illuminates her relationships with her main influences: Greek mythology, medieval and Gothic romance, Shakespeare, Dickens, Dostoevsky (on whom he has also published), Henry James and Simone Weil. (The influence of T.S.Eliot would repay more attention.) He is judicious on the development of her philosophical views, on both the attraction and rejection of Sartrian existentialism and on the fertile marriage of Platonism and Freudianism, between "a mechanical model of the psyche and a moral one". The title of the first version of *The Saint and the Artist*, Conradi's PhD thesis, *The Purification of Eros*, refers to both Plato and Freud. The myth of the cave, first redeployed as early as a 1943 review, is central to Murdoch's thought and Conradi demonstrates its shaping and subversive power in her fiction. He is not, however, absolutely reliable on Plato and classical background. Amazingly, with terms so central to his argument, he confuses Aphrodite Urania and Aphrodite Pandemos, describing sacred love as "Pandemian" in his account of *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine.* "Sophist" is, without explanation of the word's ambiguity, a misleading translation of Plato's description of Eros as *"sophistes"* at *Symposium* 203d8. Xenophon's *anabasis*, in which the cry "*thalassa, thalassa"*("the sea, the sea") was uttered, did not take place "during the Persian wars", a mistake repeated in the biography.

Conradi recognizes the complexity of influence: for example, he places the pervasive themes of exile and rootlessness in the biographical context of the only child of Irish ancestry, the larger historical context of the refugees and displaced persons with whom Murdoch worked from 1944-46, the philosophical context of Plato's description of this world as the realm of appearance and the theoretical context of the "existentialist" and "mystic" heroes defined and polarized by Murdoch.

The novels themselves tend to mock definition and polarization and Conradi is tactful with their theoretical context. Since 1961, when the terms "crystalline" and "journalistic" were extrapolated from "Against Dryness" as self-incriminating touchstones for abstract ideological patterning and burgeoning contingency, critics have been tempted to measure Murdoch's fiction against her theories and condemn either a tight or a loose fit. The novels are free-standing and it is clearly perverse to use Murdoch's theoretical writings (or anyone else's) to shoot them down, but it is reasonable to examine the work of so distinguished a thinker as a whole, though not to demand consistency.

The theories are also debated and meditated, as well as dramatized, in the fiction. Conradi prefers the later novels and thinks them better, among other reasons, because he finds the theory less explicit and more absorbed. I would argue that the theory about theories and the theory of semiology are embodied with more lightness and grace in *Under the Net* and *The Flight from the Enchanter* and the moral and philosophical conversations with the later (and mercifully often discredited) gurus can be weighty in the bad sense.

The theory of genre is an area in which Conradi works impressively well. His brilliant analysis of romance, the Gothic and the sublime in *The Unicorn* clarifies not only that novel but also the experiments of the middle period of Murdoch's fiction which often exasperated or bewildered reviewers at the time. Conradi comments that "Her closed Gothic romances have too often been read as if they were unaware of their own Romanticism" and wonderfully demonstrates the shading, subtlety, parody and critique of romance convention in this novel, whose title is an empty symbol.

The defence is totally convincing here but it is not always. In love with his subject, Conradi oddly begins his first and his last section by addressing objections to it. My own sense that he knows and understands the work as well as any critic, and better than most, did not quite reconcile me to a confrontational tone perhaps surviving from the Ph.D. stage. The main objection of both common reader and professional critic is that, from *The Unicorn* on, many of the characters, though described in detail and subject to compelling adventures, are very difficult to remember. Or, as Conradi more delicately puts it: "There can be a dissonance between the achievement of 'character' and the light in which it is seen in Murdoch's work …" It can be exasperating when the lengthy expositions demand us to absorb a great deal about people in whom we are not or not yet interested. (My own least favourite mannerism is Murdoch's habit of listing what a character is wearing every time he or she appears, like an automatic salute to "solidity of specification".) It is frustrating when a richly inventive and deeply intelligent fiction fades like an insubstantial pageant. This problem is partly but not wholly solved by discussion of provisionality, imperfection and the claims of the second-best. Conradi's discussion of the theory of character itself is suggestive on Murdoch's representation of identity and of infinite regress. But his view that the relationships are real even if the characters are not reminds me of the Cheshire Cat vanishing, grin last. And many of them do indeed vanish. His inventory of "memorable" characters includes some whom I, having re-read the relevant novels during the last two years, had clean forgotten.

But the places last, with their atmosphere, weather, visionary joys and sublime terrors. Conradi vividly conveys his own delighted response to the feel of individual novels and their relations with each other. For example: "The succession of moods between the two novels (*The Time of the Angels* and *The Nice and the Good*) prefigures Morgan's two rapid visions in … *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, a hellish, then a beatific, vision of the fall into multiplicity. If *The Time of the Angels* is a Song of Experience, *The Nice and the Good* is a Song of Innocence, restoring fertility to the wasteland, and starting where the earlier book ends, with the death of a paltry Satanist. Here the wintry sunless cold, the claustrophobia and foggy obscurity of the earlier book are replaced by a perpetual Dorset sunshine in which you can 'see infinitely far'. Here it is rain, and not sun, that is awaited and that arrives in the book's last words: 'After the winter's tale, a summer's tale.'" Conradi writes equally well on the cityscapes of *Under the Net* and the seascapes of *The Sea, The Sea*, elucidating both large archetypal structures and fresh contingent particulars. His account of the novels is informed by love and attention, Murdoch's central values.

Priscilla Martin
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Review: Jeffrey Meyers: *Privileged Moments: Encounters with Writers.* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000, 147 pp.)

Jeffrey Meyers, the professional biographer and editor, presents in this volume seven essays on contemporary literary figures with whom he was acquainted, notably chronicling in one case his attempt to secure the papers of the elusive and cantankerous V.S. Naipaul, and in another, rather touchingly, the life and homosexual loves of his friend Francis King. The book contains a 23 page essay on Iris Murdoch, recalling a family visit from the Bayleys in Boulder Colorado, as well as eight or nine meetings in England between 1978 and 1992, and giving extracts from Meyers's intermittent correspondence with Iris. He does not claim more than a minor presence among her hundreds of friends, but was clearly one of the many whose friendship she wanted to keep in good repair. She wrote hasty notes of appreciation of his work, and gratitude for appreciation from him that show the courtesy and utter lack of "grandness" that were so characteristic of her. Her relations with him over an interview commissioned by *The Paris Review* betrayed her extreme unworldliness in dealing with editors and agents, and it was typical that she described herself as "amazed and thrilled and delighted" when he wrote at one time that she was in his view "the most worthy and promising candidate for the Nobel prize".

Meyers also brings out an aspect of Iris's character which may surprise some people who know of her multitudinous and usually turbulent love affairs; namely that she was in some ways a rather old-fashioned person who not only passionately loathed the advent of computers but also said that there was "too much promiscuity" among the young, and used the description "much jollier" in expressing her preference for staying at home over travelling abroad. Some of her reported judgements are surprising in other ways, since she described her ex-lover Canetti as "a good man": the very last thing that almost anyone else would have said, and particularly surprising in view of the vitriolic way in which Canetti later described her.

To the friends of Iris and John, the most to be cherished part of Meyers's essay will be, I think, the transcript of part of a letter Iris wrote him about her marriage, in answer to an anxious enquiry triggered by a London friend's report that she and John were about to break up: "I am amazed", Iris wrote, "that someone has suggested that John and I are parted, divorced, this is absolutely <u>impossible</u>, we are utterly loving and forever together and well known to be, and have always been! Not an 'oddity' – a perfect marriage – if that's odd. Please tell the crazy <u>someone</u> that it is completely happy marriage, and he or she need not worry! I would be sorry if this false news 'went around'". As Meyers says, he did his best to suppress this malicious rumour, and the quotation should for good and all establish the most important truth that there is about Iris's life.

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Review: *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch* by Maria Antonaccio. (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2001. vii, 244p)

It is remarkable that nearly fifty years elapsed between the appearance of Murdoch's first philosophical writings in the early 1950s and the publication of a comprehensive study of her philosophical work. This unusual reticence on the part of the philosophical community testifies to the singular difficulty of writing about Murdoch's philosophy. Her work is compelling for its elaboration of a rich and original moral vocabulary, but it achieves this elaboration as much through luminous images and incisive turns of phrase as through explicit arguments. Murdoch cast moral philosophy into unorthodox forms in order to help recover, for modern thinkers, what she saw as important features of pre-modern moral philosophy. In so doing, she created a body of philosophical work which has proved very challenging.

Antonaccio is well aware of the challenges and she meets them superbly in *Picturing the Human*. This is a truly comprehensive and perceptive study of Murdoch's ethics for which we can all be grateful; discussing Murdoch's philosophy should never again be quite as difficult. There are six chapters. The first and last of these draw our attention to what Murdochian ethics has to offer to contemporary accounts of subjectivity and the chapters in between offer a supporting exposition of Murdoch's ethics. Though keyed in this way to contemporary accounts of subjectivity, Antonaccio's exposition could also be said to stand on its own as a highly rewarding study of Murdoch's philosophy.

Antonaccio maintains that Murdoch's principal contribution to contemporary ethical inquiry rests in her recovery of a full-blooded conception of the individual self or subject, what Murdoch called "the old idea of the self, the truth-seeking individual person, as a moral and spiritual center." Murdoch considered this to be a central and indispensable moral concept which had gone missing in the modern period. Antonaccio's central chapters offer a carefully structured account of Murdoch's recovery of this notion through an analysis of the key concepts in Murdoch's philosophy - such notions as reality, consciousness, freedom, perfection, love and the good.

For Murdoch, the recovery of *the individual* begins with a recovery of *metaphysics*. This is because she links the disappearance of a viable concept of the individual to the disappearance of a meaningful background or framework for individual human activity, and she identifies metaphysics - properly understood - with the latter. Murdoch considers a metaphysically rich "outer" world, one which transcends the individual, to be a condition for the kind of rich "inner" world which is at the heart of "the old idea of the self" she wishes to restore. In chapter two, Antonaccio deftly explores Murdoch's development of a conception of metaphysics which is suited to this project: a metaphysics rooted in Plato, yet cognizant of modern critiques.

The individual whose activities take place within a framework which transcends her - without "swallowing" her up - is an individual endowed with *consciousness*. Consciousness is Murdoch's term for the all-important and ubiquitous "value-bearing base … from which actions spring". It is the point of connection between the rich outer world the individual inhabits and the rich inner world which constitutes her "self," and it is irreducibly *evaluative*. There is no concept more difficult or important in Murdoch's work and I found Antonaccio's analysis of it in chapters three and four immensely illuminating. For Murdoch, consciousness implies the transcendent "outer" reality *and* the complex inner reality which she deems essential to the concept of the individual. Antonaccio helps us to see that consciousness does so in virtue of its relation to "the good." The good is both internal and external to the consciousness of the individual. On the one hand, the good is a condition for the presence of consciousness at all, just as the sun is a condition for knowledge of any kind in Plato's allegory of the cave. On the other hand, the good indicates a perfection which is *external* to consciousness and therefore able to guide consciousness toward virtue.

It is the burden of chapter five to explain how the good can be a normative principle, one which might *guide* consciousness, given that it is *internal to* consciousness. Without this, it is not clear how moral thought can possess the objectivity Murdoch claimed for it. Antonaccio proposes that the explanation rests in recognizing that Murdoch took moral thought to be *reflexive* in nature. The good represents a *reflexive* principle in this sense: it is discovered through consciousness and yet it represents a perfection which surpasses consciousness, and so can double back to provide a critical standard for it.

I found the concept of reflexivity quite effective in elucidating Murdoch's conception of the good and in distinguishing Murdoch's species of realism from that of intuitionists like Moore. But I wasn't sure it could do as much to *defend* Murdoch's ethic against the charge of subjectivism as Antonaccio would have us believe. The proponent of such a charge is going to be someone who identifies objectivity with a standpoint *fully external* to consciousness, particularly to an *evaluative* form of consciousness. To say that moral thought is reflexive is not to *secure* it from the charge that it is not truly objective in this sense. It is rather to elucidate why this charge might very well be brought against Murdoch and to indicate Murdoch's alternative conception of objectivity. Murdoch

does not offer us a knockdown argument for this alternative conception because she does not believe such arguments are generally available in moral philosophy. Any account of morality will be "half a description and half a persuasion," she says, and "it would be a pity" to deprive ourselves of such accounts simply because they are not, somehow, more than that. This is not an expression of resignation on her part; it is rather an instance of a powerful and unorthodox conception of moral philosophy at work, one that our assessments of the notion of reflexivity should bear in mind.

Chapter six makes a strong case for the prospects of Murdochian ethics by linking Murdoch's "reflexive realism" to a range of important discussions and concerns surrounding the status of subjectivity in late modernity. By this time, one feels that *Picturing the Human* has truly put Murdoch's ethics on the map and shown us what is on offer there.

Murdoch asked us to judge her work by "its power to connect, to illuminate, to explain, and to make new and fruitful places for reflection." Antonaccio fulfils all of these desiderata in her study of Murdoch's ethics. As a result, *Picturing the Human* will both find new readers for these writings and greatly enhance the understanding of those who have already made their acquaintance.

Bridget Clarke
University of Pittsburgh

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Review: *Perspektywa etyczna w powieściach Iris Murdoch* by Maria Jędrzejkiewicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1999)

The focus of the book is upon moral ideas which inform Iris Murdoch's fiction (its title in English translation is "The Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Iris Murdoch") and, for this reason, it might not seem very original. After all, most of the reviews and articles dealing with Murdoch's work discuss the moral dilemmas which are always at the core of her books. Also several important studies of the moral issues such as S. Ramanathan's *The Figures of Good* (London 1990), D. Phillips's *Agencies of the Good in the Work of Iris Murdoch* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991) or *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker, editors; Chicago University Press 1997) have penetrated and illuminated the moral questions posed in her work and dealt with their relation to fictional form. However, even if Maria Jędrzejkiewicz's book does not break new ground in this area, it is a valuable and unique contribution to Murdoch studies since it achieves a comprehensive reconstruction of the ethical vision in the whole fiction of Iris Murdoch.

In the author's view the "ethical perspective" mentioned in the title, is constituted by several elements, all of them related to or rooted in the concept of contingency, which provide the focus of attention in the particular chapters of the book. Maria Jędrzejkiewicz demonstrates that all these elements are interrelated and that the process of discovering their place and importance in the novels brings a sense of unity and order to the complex web of moral problems revealed in the characters' relationships, opinions and actions. In the first chapter the author examines the world created in Murdoch's novels, stressing its contingency emphasized by such features as variety, abundance, unpredictability, the workings of chance and transience. Then, in the following chapter, which concentrates on the contingent in man, she investigates the physical and psychological mechanisms of Murdoch's characters, illustrating the novelist's well-known version of the dualistic vision of man. The focuses of the remaining sections of Maria Jędrzejkiewicz's book are on the most important constituents of the novelist's ethical perspective - knowledge, freedom, evil and good which receive here a detailed and illuminating treatment as thematically and structurally important aspects of Murdoch's fiction. Jędrzejkiewicz manages to control the extremely rich and varied material she deals with, and in the processs of discovery and description of the ethical perspective she transforms the maze of contrived or fragmented plots, broken relationships, strange indeterminate characters and untrustworthy narrators into an integrated whole. She demonstrates that moral ideas informing all of Murdoch's novels form an interrelated logical system and argues that it is the ethical perspective that allows us to uncover meaning in the books' content and form. Thus the characters and their dilemmas, characteristic of a "scientific and anti-metaphysical age", highlight the arguments derived from a consistent examination of problems raised by moral philosophy. In Iris Murdoch's concept of man, desire for knowledge and search for freedom constitute a basis of humanity as they represent those human needs which go beyond contingency. Conversely,

ignorance and lack of freedom are the main causes of the inappropriate response to reality which is, in the novelist's view, evil or moral failure. Two main forms of evil are in fact the two ways of escaping from reality practised by most Murdoch characters: giving in to contingency (and remaining passive, uninvolved in life and treating others instrumentally) or rejecting it (and imposing one's own fantasies and obsessions on others). Finally, Jędrzejkiewicz's detailed examination of the novelist's concept of good presents it, in contrast to evil, as the appropriate response to reality based on the knowledge available to a free human being: Murdoch's characters who represent good people ("good apprentices") recognize the unique features of the reality they are part of and act according to its logic. Thus the "good" characters accept contingency and are able to transcend it and attain values.

Maria Jędrzejkiewicz's book addresses Polish students, academics and readers familiar with the novels of Iris Murdoch in Polish translation (16 of her books have been translated so far). An English study of such comprehensiveness, minuteness of detail, remarkable thoroughness and wide-ranging grasp of Murdoch criticism might be considered pedantic and perhaps superfluous in the late nineteen nineties. On the Polish scene, however, its value is enormous not only because it is the first book in Polish about Iris Murdoch's work, but also because it is a work of remarkable scholarship, a mine of bibliographical information for future Murdoch specialists in Poland.

It is also a work of great personal dedication. Fascinated with Iris Murdoch's work, Maria Jędrzejkiewicz, a lecturer at the English Department in Warsaw, started her research in the mid 1980s and published over 10 articles on Murdoch's novels, most of them in English. She wrote the book for several years struggling with a terminal illness and died in 1998, a few months before the book – obviously a labour of love - appeared in print.

Teresa Bela
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Review: *Iris Murdoch's Paradoxical Novels: Thirty Years of Critical Reception* by Barbara Stevens Heusel (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001, 185pp).

Barbara Stevens Heusel's review of scholarly studies of Iris Murdoch's fiction from 1965 to 1995 is marked by clarity, insight, and grace. Heusel has read this criticism with the slow, careful patience that a scholar brings to her field of study and with the loving attentiveness that Murdoch laid out as a hallmark of the moral life. Not only does Heusel know the scholarship inside and out, she also writes about Murdoch's fiction with passion and joy. The result is a book that provides a choice précis of the criticism and that, along the way, offers elucidating commentary on Murdoch's novels. Heusel's fine book is likely to remind readers of the excitement of reading both those novels and the scholarship.

Schematically, Heusel organizes her analysis into three phases of Murdoch criticism, each of which is characterized by a prevailing question. The first stage of criticism takes up the relationship of Murdoch's philosophy to her fiction and asks if she is a philosophical novelist. In this period, commentators such as A.S. Byatt, Peter Wolfe, Frank Baldanza and Rubin Rabinovitz developed what Heusel calls the orthodox view of Murdoch's work, a view "that her philosophy reveals ideas that the novels illustrate directly" (19). The second stage turns to Murdoch's deployment and development of formal realism, considering the extent to which Murdoch is a realistic novelist. In this period Heusel finds Richard Todd, Guy Backus, Peter Conradi and Elizabeth Dipple moving away from the original orthodox position to understand the ways in which Murdoch enlarges traditional notions of realism. The third phase, led by Dipple, Deborah Johnson, and Heusel herself, takes up an inquiry into the postmodern strategies in Murdoch's novels. This period sees the emergence of a "view that her theory of the novel allowed her much more freedom than originally seemed possible" (8). Heusel considers these developments in the scholarship exciting and necessary for, as she incisively observes, "The health of Murdoch criticism is best served by critics who are willing to search out and find new optics through which to examine her storytelling brilliance. Murdoch's novels deserve the attention of all critical lenses" (130).

Heusel's summaries and discussion of the critical scholarship are marked by three excellences. First, Heusel is subtly aware of how the critics respond to, build on, and differ from each other. She points out, for example, that Lorna Sage's "The Pursuit of Imperfection," with its insights about the incompleteness and contingency of Murdoch's plots, was extended by Conradi and Johnson. Second, Heusel discusses the scholarship

with a balance that allows her to crystallize the strengths and weaknesses of the various arguments she cites, and, occasionally, to point out a deficiency in a given study. She notes, for instance, that while Byatt was a remarkably perceptive reader of Murdoch's fiction, her grasp of Simone Weil's writings did not adequately illuminate Murdoch's novels. Heusel generously suggests that, despite this limitation, Byatt should be credited with "having initiated this line of inquiry" into the influence of Weil on Murdoch (33). Generally, Heusel maintains this balance even in assessing critics with whom she does not agree. Finally, she practises an "open-endedness" that allows her "to highlight the polyvocal quality of Murdoch's criticism and to encourage the reader to decide" the answer to the questions that dominate each phase of scholarship (96). This last excellence may grow out of Heusel's own study of Bakhtinian polyphony in Murdoch's novels. It certainly produces an effect that Murdoch herself would have appreciated, for in ventriloquizing so many critics through paraphrase, summary, and quotation, Heusel produces a dialogic play of criticism and a carnivalesque celebration of Murdoch's art.

In the interstices of her assessment of the criticism, Heusel offers shrewd insights into Murdoch's work. Her introduction begins with an excellent biographical sketch that suggests the origins of Murdoch's concerns with Whitehall bureaucracy and with exile. Heusel rightly reminds us that paradox and irony are pervasive in Murdoch's thinking and writing as are her concerns with contingency and illusion. She goes on to point out that, as a result, Murdoch was not hesitant to discard an outgrown position and, at times, to arrive at conclusions that contradicted positions she had previously held. "As a thinker she never stopped growing and changing" (9). Thus, as Heusel insists, Murdoch's work has a protean quality. "Murdoch's oeuvre continually refused to fit into any one pigeonhole, or even a series of them: as soon as a slot such as Gothic novel seemed appropriate, Murdoch would try a new genre" (25).

Only two slips are discernible in Heusel's thoughtful study. The first is a minor and occasional confusion of the dates assigned to the three phases of Murdoch criticism; the initial earliest phase is variously said to end in 1974, 1976, and 1977. Similarly, the latest phase is described as ending in 1995 and as extending to the late 1990s. The second glitch involves two departures from the equity with which Heusel usually assesses other critics. After noting that Rabinovitz claimed that Murdoch missed the first rank of novelists, Heusel says that he "is stuck in his own 1968 worldview" (37). This dismissal may be too harsh inasmuch as we are all at any given moment more or less "stuck" in our own worldview; Murdoch herself might have said that to become unstuck requires consistent effort and patient attention to reality. Similarly, though Heusel notes the significance of Backus's provocative study of Murdoch, she faults him more severely than she does any other critic. Noting that Backus does not appreciate the spiritual dimension of Murdoch's work, Heusel adds that "he seems to lack a spiritual calm" (96). This statement disappointingly and radically deflates the generosity of so much of Heusel's analysis. Mercifully, the deflation is momentary and creates only a fleeting interruption of Heusel's valuable analysis of the critical reception of Murdoch's novels, an analysis that has depth and range and that is sustained by a thorough and deeply appreciative knowledge of the scholarship and its subject.

J. Robert Baker
Fairmont State College

*

Editorial Column

A special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* (47-3) Fall 2001, (John Hopkins Press for the Department of English, Purdue University) centred on the work of Iris Murdoch. Contributions focus on the nature, sources and implications of Murdoch's fictional practice. They comprise: "Approaches to Murdoch" by David Herman; "Philosophy's Dangerous Pupil: Murdoch and Derrida" by Bran Nicol; "Envisioning the Good: Iris Murdoch's Moral Psychology" by A.E. Denham; "Feminist Uses of the Fantastic in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea"* by Katherine Weese, "Desires Deferred: Homosexual and Queer Representation in the Novels of Iris Murdoch" by W.S.Hampl; "Realism Disavowed? Discourses of Memory and High Incarnations in *Jackson's Dilemma*" by Richard Todd and the issue concluded with an interview with Iris Murdoch by S.B.Sagare. This interview is also published in *Odyssey: International Journal for Literature and Culture* Vol. IV 2000 pages1-26. The *Modern Fiction Studies* special issue will be reviewed in the next edition of *The Iris Murdoch News Letter*.

The BBC screened "Strange Love", an edition of the *Omnibus* series, on Iris Murdoch on January 23rd 2001. The programme explored how various aspects of Murdoch's life are revealed in John Bayley's Memoirs, Richard Eyre's film, *Iris*, and Peter Conradi's biography, *Iris Murdoch: A Life*. There were interviews with John Bayley and a selection of Murdoch's close friends. Also interviewed were Peter Conradi, Margaret Drabble and Richard Eyre, amongst others.

An art exhibition entitled "when the gods sing: a tribute to the life and work of Iris Murdoch", by the artist, Mary-Glynn Boies was held in Walton Street Oxford from 4th September – 9th October 2001. The artist can be contacted at maryglynnboies@yahoo.com. The website is http://www.maryglynnboies.com

Peter Conradi has compiled the entry on Iris Murdoch in the forthcoming revised *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Iris Murdoch's Paradoxical Novels: Thirty Years of Critical Reception is the first study of the literary criticism of her novels. Collecting the major critics who have described for the last third of a century the phenomenon of Iris Murdoch's fiction, this study analyzes the stories her critics tell about her artistic processes. There are three major questions at the heart of this reception: to what extent is she a philosophical novelist, a realistic novelist, a post-modern novelist. These three questions form the structure of the present study. The book also deals with the question of Murdoch's status as a novelist. This is an intriguing question since Murdoch's works have been compared to those of Shakespeare, and her name has been put forward for the Nobel Prize in literature. Her works have been translated into 29 languages, and Harold Bloom says of her: "no other contemporary British novelist seems to me of Murdoch's eminence." This study is the first full-length work to deal with the literary criticism on Murdoch.

Barbara Stevens Heusel is associate professor of English at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri. This book (197pp, 9 x 6in, 1 57113 089 6, £35.00 / US$55.00. Published August 200) is published by Camden House, an imprint of Boydell & Brewer, **and is available to members of the Iris Murdoch Society at the special price of £26.25 / US$41.25** (plus postage and packing UK £2.00, North America US$4.00, Rest of the World £4.00). Please quote reference =**01198**. UK & rest of the world order from Boydell & Brewer Ltd, PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK. Tel: 00 44 (0)1394 411320, e-mail: boydell@boydell.co.uk North America order from Boydell & Brewer Inc., Box 41026,Rochester NY 14604-4126, USA. Tel: (716) 275-0419, e-mail 104572.1422@compuserve.com Cheques payable to Boydell & Brewer. Offer ends 30th April 2002.

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The Iris Murdoch Society

The Iris Murdoch News Letter is the publication of The Iris Murdoch Society, formed at the Modern Language Association Convention in New York City in December 1986. It appears annually, offering a forum for short articles, reviews and notices, and keeps members of the society informed of new publication, symposia and other news that has a bearing on the life and work of Iris Murdoch.

2001 Meeting of the Iris Murdoch Society:

The 2001 Meeting of the Iris Murdoch Society was held on Friday 23rd February 2001 following the Murdoch session at the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, University of Louisville, Kentucky. The topic for the next Twentieth Century Literature Conference Panel will be "Art, Architecture and Philosophy in Murdoch's Writing".

If you would like to join the Iris Murdoch society and automatically receive the News Letter please contact:

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Treasurer's Report

The Star Financial Bank Balance as of December 2000 was $1253.30. Balance as of 31st January 2002 was $1030.71. The balance reflects the following transactions: additions for membership $237.00, bank interest, $30.27 deductions for copying and postage $489.86. The Iris Murdoch Society balance in the Halifax Building Society, Kingston, Surrey, England in December 2000 was £449.69. The current balance, reflecting additions of membership (£257.00), bank interest (£3.24), and deductions for photography and copyright expenditure (£182.13) Tax (£0.65) publication expenses, postage and binding (£200), is £327.15.

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The cover photograph of the portrait of Iris Murdoch by Marie-Louise von Motesiczky is reprinted with the kind permission of St Anne's College, Oxford.

The first two articles in this edition of *The Iris Murdoch News Letter* are adapted from papers given at the Iris Murdoch Conference, which was held at St Anne's College, Oxford on Saturday, September 13, 2002. There were four papers in all. Those given by Peter Conradi (Iris Murdoch's biographer) and Bran Nicol (Senior Lecturer at the University of Portsmouth) are published below. The third paper, entitled "Time in *The Bell* and Other Novels" and given by Priscilla Martin, St Edmund Hall, Oxford, can be found in *Interfaces 19/20*, Volume 2 (December 2002), 75–91. A full version of the final paper given by Alison Denham (Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at St Anne's College, Oxford), entitled "Envisioning the Good: Iris Murdoch's Moral Philosophy," can be found in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 47, No. 3, Fall 2001, 602–29. This was a special issue, dedicated entirely to the work of Iris Murdoch.

Peter Conradi: Writing *Iris Murdoch: A Life* – Freud versus Multiplicity

Socrates in *Philebus*: "It is bad if we arrive at the One or the Many, *too quickly*"

In a splendid recent article, Mark Kinkead-Weekes points out: "a strictly chronological method [in biography] shows greater reverence and respect than confident analysis does for the changefulness and mystery of human beings."[1] He argues, for example, that Hermione Lee's conflation of three periods of Woolf's madness into a single chapter diminishes and belies the singularity of each: "We do not, alas, live our lives in themes, but day by day."[2]

The common urge in much biography – to find some underlying explanation, theme or unified "life-myth," which can be read backwards and forwards, irrespective of chronology – may now be dwindling. When I wrote *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, I struggled for my publisher's agreement to include even two, *only partly*, thematic chapters (19 and 20). Iris Murdoch herself employed the term "life-myth" in an interview with Malcolm Bradbury.

Since Iris shows, in many of her novels, characters struggling for release from exactly such life-myths, it is reasonable to enquire what her own life-myth was. If, in particular, she had no direct experience of Oedipal conflict, why did she write about it with such conviction and obsessionality? So, although she referred to her family life as a "perfect Trinity of love" (which unconsciously proposes a Messianic role for the child), I thought that I would, today, try first to construct a basic Freudian and thematic reading, then follow this in the second part of this paper with some of my actual experiences and revelations as a biographer. This Freudian reading will be undeterred by my ignorance of psychoanalytic theory and of Murdoch's own hostility to such reductionism: "Since she was hostile, she must have had something to hide." Or so they say.

A life-myth, Iris believed, was usually unconscious. Malcolm Bowie[3] argues that discussion of life-myth offers biographer and reader the linear passage of a childhood paradigm through an indefinite series of adult scenes, one early cause producing an unceasing procession of later effects. (One might query the word "unceasing.") "[Each] young child is hero of the Oedipal drama. Within her early experience the explanation for neurotic misery is found: the early configurations of the individual's libido … within the family group hold a key to her later erotic career."[4]

Of the possibility of a female Oedipus complex Freud noted, "things happen in just the same way with little girls, with the necessary changes: an affectionate attachment to her father, a need to get rid of her mother as superfluous."[5] Iris appeared to be praising Freud's discovery of Oedipal conflict in 1970.[6]

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[1] Mark Kinkead-Weekes. "Writing Lives Forwards: A Case for Strictly Chronological Biography." *Mapping Lives, The Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St Clair. OUP for the British Academy, 2002, 252.

[2] Roy Foster. *W. B. Yeats: A Life*. Volume I, xxvi–xxvii. See also "A chronological approach permits the biographer 'to work on, then narrate in, time-spans small enough to allow all the evidence to be freshly commanded at once, with nothing but space ahead'"(*Mapping Lives*, 237).

[3] Malcolm Bowie. "Freud and the Art of Biography." *Mapping Lives, The Uses of Biography*. Op cit., 177–92.

[4] Bowie, op cit., 180.

[5] Penguin, *Freud*, Volume 1 (1976): 376

[6] "A Note on Drama." *Cue Magazine* (September 1970): 13–14.

2: Oedipal Conflict

Of course Iris Murdoch was in love with her father. John Bayley surmised that Hughes and Rene's marriage was, by mutual agreement, a *mariage blanc*: almost any relationship in an Iris Murdoch novel can be sexualised. There may be a connection between these. Tension caused by a *mariage blanc* might cause an adolescent girl to feel an unusual degree of unconscious responsibility for the well-being of her father. When he died, Iris noted in her Journal, "he was so gentle, so quiet, so kind … few knew him or knew how good he was. He taught me so much." It was of Hughes she was thinking when Charles Arrowby writes, "I was his comrade, his reading companion, *possibly the only person with whom he ever had a serious conversation*." Iris often fell in love with father-substitutes, some good, a few notably unpleasant, cold-hearted and power-driven. Fraenkel was 31 years her senior; MacKinnon older by seven years; Balogh and Canetti by twelve; Momigliano by eleven years; Steiner by ten. All but MacKinnon were Jewish (as were, by part descent, David Hicks and Yorick Smythies). Philo-Semitism is an aspect of hunger-for-fathers: "if only my wise Jew were not such a bore," she noted of one novel, and Jews in her work belong to a race of involuntary teachers or father-figures, "wise" willy-nilly.

At a home cricket match at Badminton school in July 1937, Iris's mother, Rene, struck observers by appearing to contemporaries like a "younger sister" to Iris. Our Freudian might say – without ignoring the role of superior intellect – that Iris had won the Oedipal competition with her mother hands-down by the age of 18. Mary Midgley, a witness with a remarkable memory and who knew Iris and her family from 1938, observed, "*Irene and Hughes seemed to expect of Iris only what she wanted*." Midgley added, "the family-home seemed happy … [without] the kind of conflicts most people experience." John Bayley, too, attests how peaceful and harmonious Eastbourne Terrace was; Iris herself wrote of her parents bringing her up "too leniently." A world beyond conflicts is presumably – to a Freudian – a world in which a war has been won.

That her father, Hughes, sometimes acted as mother in the home might suggest unconscious collusion between father and daughter to render the mother yet more powerless:[7] after Hughes's death, Rene proved herself a perfectly competent housewife. Iris "loved" her mother but identified with her father. Indeed, she later imitated parental role-reversal: wife (John) attempting the cooking, while the major wage-earner in the public world washed up. Iris's identification with men has often been noted, not least by Bayley. In 1988, she wrote to me: "*The sex of one's god must be a very deep matter. I think my daemons are all male.*"[8] Six of her first-person narrators are men, and Iris was commonly criticized for failing to invent women-narrators. That she so strongly identified with, and emphasized, her maternal Richardson pedigree – far more than her paternal Murdoch inheritance – might be explained by the fact that the Richardsons, erstwhile minor gentry now "gone to pot," played a *paternalistic role* in Irish history.

In 1968, Iris answered the question about whether her work was autobiographical by saying that, though she did not wish to write from life, "there were friendships which influenced me deeply when I was younger, and something to do with them is in my books because it is within me." What she called "the quadrilateral tale" played out at Seaforth in 1943–44 affected her profoundly.[9] A friend's comment on these years, "Iris Murdoch lost a family," is resonant. The themes of that year (two "siblings" in apparent competition for two partners) – get into many of her fictions:[10] the erotic symmetry of her plots, where couplings obey unconscious patterns, what Eilenberg in the current *London Review of Books* calls "the guiltily gratifying rhythms and geometries of passion and form" have an evident life-source. In "taking on" the theme of erotic imbroglio, Iris was also mapping something true to its time: in the lower photographs of Badminton School in the biography, Bernard Leach's dark-haired daughter Eleanor is identified below a smiling Iris. Leach (apparently) later committed suicide after many sorrows, which included her husband falling in love with her sister Jasmine – a tragic story to recall Iris's plots, which are, by contrast, essentially *comic*.

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[7] Cooking, washing up, cleaning – see *Iris Murdoch: A Life.*

[8] A propos Tibetan Buddhism.

[9] [When] in 1993, Iris remarked, in answer to a confidence, "I wish I'd kept the flat I shared in the war," I felt I was being told something bigger than a tenancy of a flat. Undeclared emotion and a certain rehearsed casualness later recalled Prospero's words to Miranda about "*the dark backward and abysm of time.*"

[10] *Under the Net*, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *A Severed Head*, *Bruno's Dream*, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, *An Accidental Man*, *The Time of the Angels.*

The frequency with which incest recurs in Murdoch's early fiction, brother-sister or father-daughter, has been often commented on.[11] Elizabeth witnessing the act of father-daughter incest in *The Time of the Angels* is one crux of the plot. Although Murdoch claimed her "incest period was over," grandfather/granddaughter incest crops up as late as *The Philosopher's Pupil*, and Jesse has incestuous designs on his daughter in *The Good Apprentice*.

Many of Murdoch's characters are in love with their parent of the opposite sex. Rain Carter (in *The Sandcastle*) and Peter Foster (in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*) find surrogates in Mor and in Aunt Morgan respectively: Edmund Narraway (in *The Italian Girl*), Elizabeth Fisher (in *The Time of the Angels*), Bruno (in *Bruno's Dream*), David in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, Henry in *Henry and Cato*. Oedipal rivalry between mother and daughter for the affections of a father-surrogate is a buried theme in *An Unofficial Rose*, where Miranda and Anne compete for Felix. The theme recurs in *The Black Prince*, avowedly autobiographical on the model of *Hamlet*, where Julian and Rachel Baffin compete first for Arnold's affections, and later for Bradley's. Iris's notes for the novel in Iowa emphasize Julian's intense love for her father. Bradley's seminar to Julian on the secret meanings of *Hamlet* confirms the Freudian reading before exploring a Neoplatonic one. The novel, moreover, concerns a mother – Rachel – murdering her husband over the theft of her identity, and the authorial Bradley's acceptance of complicity in the guilt of this.

After Marx and the saints of Anglo-Catholicism, Murdoch's favoured philosopher was Plato. She wrote that Plato "is in favour of religion and Fathers … and although he never 'invents' a full-dress Father-God, his work abounds in images of paternity." Freud, by contrast, was "against religion and against fathers." And "*it would be hard to overestimate the effect upon* [Plato] *of the death of Socrates*."[12] Not all agree that Freud is "against fathers." And how does Iris know what Plato felt when Socrates died? It is hard to avoid feeling that she was speaking of her own grief at Hughes's death.[13] Her life and work, like Plato's, also "abound in images of paternity" while mistrusting power.[14]

Murdoch's *oeuvre* starts and ends with the question of good and bad father-figures: Hugo is a good father to Jake, Mischa an equivocal father to *his* creatures. The message of both books, as Midgley pointed out, is that you must wean yourself from fathers and empower yourself:[15] Jake becomes a writer in his own right, free from Breteuil *and* Hugo; in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, the characters variously seek independence from Mischa, and their own autonomy. Later novels of course often address religious issues[16] and the question of life after the demise of God-the-Father.

Dying or murdered fathers abound: Carel, Bruno, Rupert, Baffin, Guy, Rozanov, Jesse, Vallar, and Peter Mir.[17] The nineteenth-century novel (it has been said) often concerned good and bad parenting. Good versus bad *father-ing* and *discipleship* figure throughout Iris Murdoch's fictions. These themes link *Under the Net* with *The Message to the Planet*, *The Philosopher's Pupil*, etc. There are more bad fathers than good. Her saints too – Hugo, Bledyard, Tallis, Stuart – are often male.[18] And there are few children.

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[11] *The Bell, A Severed Head, The Time of the Angels, The Red and the Green.*

[12] Iris Murdoch. "The Fire and the Sun." *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. Peter Conradi. London: Chatto & Windus, 419.

[13] Something she expressed in the early 1960s to her Royal College of Art protégé David Morgan

[14] The "Sublime" fascinated her. Thomas Weiskel, in his brilliant *The Romantic Sublime*, gives a strongly Freudian account of the Sublime – which confers the highest meaning on the "failure to understand" – showing how this offers a positive resolution of Oedipal conflict.

[15] Mary Midgley, recording for *Omnibus*, BBC, 2001 (unused footage).

[16] *The Bell, The Unicorn, The Time of the Angels.*

[17] Carel in *The Time of the Angels*, Bruno in *Bruno's Dream*, Rupert in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Baffin in *The Black Prince*, Guy in *Nuns and Soldiers*, Rozanov in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, Jesse in *The Good Apprentice*, Vallar in *The Message to the Planet*, Peter Mir in *The Green Knight.*

[18] The sequence of good women – Anne Peronett, Kathleen Drumm, Anne Cavidge –are, it could be argued marginally less compelling or interesting to their author and hence to us as readers. Others of what Pym termed her "excellent women" are [at] the edge of the action, like the Abbess in *The Bell*, or Pat Raven, mistress to John Forbes (out of loyalty and love to John's dead wife, Ruth) in *Henry and Cato*.

3: Peter Pan

Iris Murdoch's novels have been called "crash-courses in maturity":[19] growing up in each is always to be begun again.[20] As the 90-year-old Catholic priest remarked, "*au fond ils n'ya pas des adultes*": *Peter Pan* illustrates this. J. M. Barrie noted in 1921 as the *real* meaning of that "terrible masterpiece": "Desperate attempt to grow up but can't." Iris believed that the "greatest of all moments in theatre" was Peter Pan's appearance outside the Darling nursery window: "very exciting … very moving … frightening."[21] She admired the division within the play between the world of the Darlings and Never Never Land. While J. M. Barrie, moreover, twice notes that Peter Pan, if he grew up, might turn into Captain Hook, Murdoch noticed a quite different doubling: she was interested in the fact that Captain Hook and Mr. Darling might be played by the same actor: the good father *is* the bad father.

"Peter Pan" is a boy played by an actress. Murdoch sometimes felt herself similarly mixed. On Saturday, April 2, 1938, after one year's correspondence, she elected to meet James Henderson Scott by Peter Pan's statue in Kensington Gardens. Froebel children evidently visited and loved the statue,[22] described in *An Accidental Man* as "one of the sacred places of [Matthew's] childhood." Here, by the statue, a fantasy love-relationship by letter turned into friendship instead – and, as a Freudian might say, primary narcissism received a check. "Philosophers attack their own faults," Murdoch later wrote. The faults she repeatedly attacked were solipsism, romanticism and fantasy. It would have been odd if her life had lacked them. The "sinister boy" *Peter Pan* haunts her novels (especially in the 1970s – when she wrote her best novels).[23] In *An Accidental Man* Gracie pursues Matthew to the statue. Rachel compares Bradley with Peter in *The Black Prince*; Charles Arrowby loves to direct the play; in *A Word Child* crucial scenes take place near the statue: the play is to be the office pantomime, and there are informal comic seminars on it. These narrator-heroes are in love with their own youth: [they are] youth-haunted. Hilary is possessed by events that happened during his early adulthood; Charles by a love-affair forty years before; Bradley falls in love with a girl forty years younger than he.

Murdoch typically saw in *Peter Pan* an "immature spirituality": a play about the terrible necessity of growing up. But it is also a subversive celebration of the powers of invention explicitly denied to grown-ups. Why bother to grow up if, Wordsworth-like, you lose the ability to quicken or wonder at beauty? Iris thus also saw in *Peter Pan* a "play about the relationship of an author with his own subconscious mind."[24] The saint needs to grow up: the artist's immaturity is beyond cost. It is striking that Peter does not intend to abduct the Darling children. He arrives because he loves to listen to stories: about other people's lives and his own. Starved of stories, he oddly inhabits an alternative reality like a novelist's, put together from old narratives. Never Land is made up out of bits of old stories: pirates, mermaids, red Indians, fairies. Iris, too, lived in a narrative world and was hungry for inspiring stories. In 1964, she wrote to a friend that she, too, "liked being told things" and included this appetite at the end of *The Philosopher's Pupil* where the narrator acknowledges that he is one whose role in life is to "listen to stories."

Peter is first sighted behind glass, self-sufficient yet lonely, unable to engage in real relationships or grow up, never physically touched during the play, a "being from elsewhere."[25] It is not without interest that one Somerville contemporary remembered Iris as having a "covering of ice," and even a sympathetic friend has described her as belonging, like a cat, essentially to herself. Anna, in *Under the Net*, has Murdoch's "calculated avoidance of self-surrender." While her falling for difficult older men – monsters – may suggest a desire for vulnerability, the running of concurrent affairs, on the other hand, implies an unwillingness fully to commit oneself. Canetti, in 1993, maliciously observed, "she was unable truly to lose herself." This was a condition of separateness [that] he – like many creative writers – shared: he might easily be declared all-time world-champion. Separateness of course also belongs to saints.

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[19] Peter Kemp. "The Flight against Fantasy." *Modern Fiction Studies*, XV, No. 3, August 1969, 403–15.

[20] Even in 1966 what she called "the summer of the three S's" disturbed Iris; and Stuart Hampshire, in the *New York Review of Books*, memorably painted her as an unalloyed pagan.

[21] Jean-Louis Chevalier, ed. *Recontres avec Iris Murdoch*. Caen: Centre des Recherches de Litterature at Linguistique des Pays de Langue Anglaise, 1978.

[22] Miriam Allott in *Iris Murdoch: A Life*. When did Iris Murdoch see the play? Perhaps, if the dates fit, at the Scala, where, later (in my post-war childhood), it was put on every Christmas.

[23] She reported herself much impressed when John Bayley lent her Barrie's 1911 novel *Peter Pan.*

[24] J-L Chevalier. "Rencontres avec IM." Université de Caen, 1978.

[25] *A Word Child*, 227.

Murdoch wrote to David Hicks on October 10, 1945: "When I was younger … I loved writing long letters to all sorts of people – a kind of exhibitionism I daresay." Pen-friendship offers intimacy without proximity. Epistolary friendship with Scott began a series: Frank Thompson replaced Scott as distant love-object from 1941 to 1944; David Hicks replaced Frank from 1944 to 1946;[26] Queneau replaced Hicks from 1946 to 1956. (I read this last sequence only as the biography was being "set" and return to it later.)

Marriage and artistic success in 1956 – which is to say "happiness" – attenuated *two* patterns: the pattern of a bullying older man and the sequence of absent lover-friends. Like the children in *Peter Pan*, Murdoch was divided between two worlds: the nursery world of Steeple-Aston with its "wind-in-the-willows" food, and the Never Never Land of London to explore outside: her first-person novels are *always* also London novels.[27] Absent pen-friends, henceforth, were often admirers of her work.

4: Writing the Biography

The fascination and difficulty of biography-writing – especially of *first* biography-writing – is that no *a priori* solutions exist. It resembles landing in enemy territory in wartime at night without map, torch or compass to capture a nameless city in a disputed location. Each chapter must honour the available sources,[28] then invent its own emblematic unity and coherence, its own path through the daunting masses of available material. Of course, there must be an overall trajectory too, [which was] underlined in the paperback [edition of the biography] by renaming the three parts, *Innocence*, *Innocence Lost* and *Innocence Regained*.

Richard Holmes has argued that "the true biographic process begins precisely at the moment … where this naïve love [of biographer for subject] breaks down."[29] For me, this happened when seeing, with intense discomfort, that the relations of the young bohemian Iris Murdoch around 1953 – [involving] power, collection and the enjoyment of dependency – sometimes resembled those of Elias Canetti. By the way, Canetti, whose father died when he was a child, was singled out for immensely cruel bullying by his mother. She is said to have wanted all three of her sons to win the Nobel Prize, but Elias was a special case: Canetti is a startling victim-hero of Oedipal rivalry. Chapter 13 was for me the biography's centre, and I detected Canetti behind those notably bad manipulative father-figures: Mischa in *Flight from the Enchanter*, Julius in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and Charles in *The Sea, The Sea*. Marcel Reich-Ranicki recently noted Canetti's jealous desire to "be the only writer" in the cosmos.[30] Canetti's motivation in reading the entire *oeuvre* of another writer before a meeting was partly "power": mastering the *oeuvre* was the way to master the man. His "help" to the young recalled Svengali's to Trilby. Iris's assiduous help – I could demonstrate – was disinterested.[31]

Just as a successful analysis would presumably be judged by its enabling the *analysand* to break patterns, so spirituality too – like happiness – breaks neurotic repetition-compulsion, and cuts habitual patterns and fixated modes of perception. Freudian *writing* sometimes offers, by curious contrast, a "sustained flight from uncertainty and ambiguity;'[32] its singling out of one theme [is] a willed

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[26] Murdoch's brief engagement to Hicks in 1946, after a seven-year correspondence, shows that this writing had power-in-the-world, [and] was not mere "fantasy."

[27] Unlike *The Sandcastle*, *The Unicorn*, and *The Red and The Green*.

[28] What is available diminishes. Isaiah Berlin and Janet Stone died before I could speak with them (and Cleaver did not recall Iris Murdoch in pre-war family holidays!). Since writing, Sybil Livingston, Elizabeth Anscombe, Barbara Denny, Muriel Chapman, John Grigg, Noel Martin, Sister Marian, Joze Jancar. Leo Pliatzky, Margaret Rake, and many others, have died.

[29] Richard Holmes. "The Proper Study?" *Mapping Lives*, 332.

[30] Marcel Reich-Ranicki. *The Author of Myself*. London: 2001, Chapter 13.

[31] Iris Murdoch worked hard (so far as I can understand) at *all* typescripts sent to her, and helped their authors. With immense care she addressed the novels of Wollheim, Hicks, and Pliatzky: this must be the tip of the iceberg. There are many other cases. It is unimaginable, however, that Elias Canetti would be described, as was Iris Murdoch by David Pears, as a "center of truth". The Canetti I met was a centre of untruth.

[32] Malcolm Bowie. "Freud and the Art of Biography." *Mapping Lives*, 190.

impoverishment of other modes of explanation. It minimizes change and contingency, both themes of Iris Murdoch's story. Even Canetti asserted that biography should leave certain areas (he does not specify which) mysterious.

Murdoch's religious urge, which repeatedly emphasizes the moral importance of "transformed sexual energy," cannot simply be collapsed down into Oedipal guilt. To do so fails to honour the shape of her life-as-pilgrimage and her courage closely to examine who she once had been, in the service of change.

In *Under the Net* Hugo teaches Jake that "all stories are lies", because truth is *local* and *particular*. This was the truth I sought. The biographer must **construct** a story. I decided to tell a *succession* of short stories that might be mutually contradictory, but were each internally coherent, and (I felt) individually truthful. Biography has been called "the verdict of mediocrity on genius," sometimes loving reduction more than complexity. I wanted to eschew "reduction."

Biography seems to be a form with only the one mysterious rule: that it must seek ways of *telling the truth*, in a three-way transaction always particular to (and in some ways *private* to) subject, biographer, and the material available. It seeks truth about the most mysterious thing in the world, the reality of someone other than oneself, whose memory is not necessarily reliable. Iris believed, even around 1990, that she had gone straight to Brussels from the Treasury (eliding 15 unglamorous months of dull and frustrating office-work in Portland Place) and then straight from Austria to Cambridge (eliding a further 15 months, this time of depression, poverty and uncertainty). This was not Alzheimer's confusion: she evidently believed she and Frank would have married – and since she repeated this to me 15 years on, the 1988 report is to be believed.[33]

There were discoveries about Iris's background. She rose from humbler and more raffish beginnings than is generally supposed, or than she came to believe. Terry Eagleton typically identified her as "*haute bourgoise*."[34] She never discounted this. Her forgotten aunt, Gertie Bell, married to a car-mechanic, may – judging by one photograph – already have been alcoholic by the 1920s, like her sister, Rene, in her last years, and – probably – also like Gertie's and Rene's father. Of her four Bell first cousins, one worked as a fitter, one as a storeman and one as a long-distance lorry-driver for Cadbury's in Dublin. The fourth came to England and got lost. None of the Bells I spoke with knew they were "down-start gentry." None attended University. The Bell cousins were never mentioned to the Belfast first cousins, who were mainly Plymouth Brethren.

I had the advantage of knowing the work well, and no idea what the life had been. Her letters and edited journals – the slow, gradual discovery of which continued into 2001 – startled me by their immediacy … I wanted the reader to *undergo the story*, as I had in researching it, without reaching out after fact and certainty. I thought Iris's irreducibility could be further displayed by allowing unexplained shifts to happen, so that, as soon as one began to rest in one viewpoint, a new perspective was presented. "We are tissue and tissues of different *personae*, and yet we are nothing at all," Bradley Pearson noted.[35]

I also wanted [the biography] to resemble an Iris Murdoch novel, a group portrait whose cast of characters keeps reappearing in new guises. I admired Alethea Hayter's *A Sultry Month*, and Penelope Fitzgerald's portrait of her father and three Knox uncles. It was fortuitous that everyone who counted in Iris's story in 1939 could be brought back again in a later persona.

Copies of the surviving letters of Iris and Frank Thompson, who shared high intelligence and warm-heartedness, arrived in December 1997. They seemed to indicate that Iris fell in love with Frank, by letter, during 1943. Michael Foot was startled by, and at once agreed with, this perception. Structuring Part I around this well-documented friendship between Iris and Frank had advantages. Frank was a romantic figure, his death mourned with considerable emotion by surviving friends.[36] It had been Phillipa Foot who brought Iris news of Frank's murder in 1944. Phillipa and I met Frank's partisan General in Bulgaria in 1999 – 14 days before he died. A surviving eye-witness described Frank's murder, which differed widely from all written accounts.

The first part of *Iris Murdoch: A Life*, culminating in Frank Thompson's murder, was written with the knowledge that writer and reader alike had to undergo this event, as Iris did in real life, and exploits

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[33] Sue Summers. "The Lost Loves of Iris Murdoch." "You" Magazine, *Mail on Sunday*. 14 March 1988: 17–21.

[34] An article on Bayley by Eagleton in *NLR* (details mislaid).

[35] Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, in Bradley Pearson's *Hamlet* seminar to Julian (chapter 20).

[36] When I told Noel Martin that Phillipa Foot and I would visit Frank's grave in Bulgaria in 1999, he remarked lightly and humourously, but with feeling: "Kiss the ground for me, would you?"

dramatic irony. It was consciously fashioned (though this sounds pretentious) with Iris and Frank's fascination with Homer and Aeschylus in mind.[37] The unsettling arrival of Iris's letters to David Hicks immediately after I'd written Chapter 7 enabled a less idealistic account.

When Iris's wartime poems came to light around 2000, I hunted in some anguish for a poem for Frank. I knew that Iris wrote poems for each of those she loved. If I were right, Iris should have written a poem for Frank around the autumn of 1943. If there were *no* poem for Frank, the thesis of Part 1 was false. I found six poems for "DH" (David Hicks), a few for "DM" (Donald MacKinnon) and, finally, after going through the book twice, a poem for Frank dated September 1943, which is included as a footnote in Chapter 7.

I wanted to show Iris in a series of institutional frames/contexts: Ireland – Froebel – Badminton – Somerville – Treasury – UNRRA – Cambridge – St Anne's – RCA: making each of these internally coherent, like a succession of short stories, a figure-in-an-altering-landscape. A series of perspectives (ideally, cultural histories) might productively collide with each other and thus honour both her protean nature – "tissues and tissues of different *personae*" – and her "irreducibility." Getting a chapter heading right was, each time, a different liberation. I could not see how to tell the "quadrilateral tale" and Frank's demise together, until the French proverb "*A la guerre, comme a la guerre*" came to me, evoking the ruthlessness that belonged in both stories. I was distressed about how to tackle the final chapter, then found a path by exploring the muteness of the Alzheimer's patient vis-à-vis that of the mystic. Sometimes, the problem of constructing a short section *within* a chapter was solved in a similar way: Murdoch's remark in a letter to Frank Thompson on the "playtime of the 1930s" helped connect the Magpies to the war; the Great Fog of December 1952 seemed to relate both to Canetti's habitual obfuscations and to the fogs surrounding power-figures in *A Severed Head* and *The Time of the Angels*. Understanding that there might be a connection between her surveillance (spying) for the Communist Party and her carrying out concurrent love affairs helped Chapter 6. Seeing that desire for virtue *was* part for her desire for invisibility helped in writing Chapter 19.

There were lost-letter-dramas. Leo Pliatzky searched for over a year for Iris's letters to him. I dreaded Iris having written to Leo in an idiom recalling her letters to Frank. For two years Frank's wartime letters to Robert Graves's daughter, Katherine Nicolson, a childhood neighbour, were also lost. After Leo's death, Murdoch's letters to him arrived; soon copies of Frank's letters to Katherine came from Australia. Frank Thompson wrote [to] Katherine Nicholson as if he were an affectionate elder brother, while Iris's [letters] to Leo Pliatzky are sober and unrevealing.

One of the strangest discoveries was how inter-related nearly everyone was. It would have intolerably lengthened the narrative to display this. To take one example – I did not expect any connection between Wittgenstein's and Canetti's worlds: but, during the war, Polly Smythies's sister had lived with Canetti's friend and neighbour Honor Frost. The world of middle and upper class Britain in the mid- and late twentieth century closely resembled the intricacies of Iris Murdoch's novels.

There were startling coincidences (apart from getting into the underground carriage in 1997 on the way to meet Leo Pliatzky for the first of many meetings, to find myself sitting directly opposite John and Iris). Mary Midgley told me that, during the war, Iris had lent a typewriter to a poet who declined to return it. Indeed, a typewritten letter from Iris to Frank (from spring 1943) survived. Then a neighbour in Wales told me that she had lent Iris a Corona 4 typewriter, and Iris had sent her a large cheque after the war as compensation for its loss.[38] At such moments the past came closer.

There were two trips to Paris (to visit Friedl's sister and locate the Queneau letters), one to Dublin, one to Belfast, one to Bulgaria, one to Massachusetts to meet Alan Forbes, and one to Aberdeen to talk to Lois MacKinnon (that meeting was helpful for both parties). Biography of the recently dead affects survivors (of course). Roger Senhouse on being "outed" in *Lytton Strachey* said to Michael Holroyd, "but I shan't be able to get into the Members 'room' at Lords cricket ground." Two friends were cross, even in 2002, at being described as "gay." One beneficiary of Iris's will wished – on learning of her wartime Communist Party activities – to return her bequest. An early friend was delighted to learn of Iris's poem for him in July 1943. There were moments of intense surprise, not all unpleasant: accessing Hulton-Getty photos with help from Humphrey Spender; finding a photograph from Toronto of three broom-bushes; uncovering Olive Scott and, hence, James Scott's journals; locating Franz Baermann Steiner's journal and

[37] See "Agamemnon Class 39" (the poem dedicated to Frank Thompson's memory). *Poems by Iris Murdoch*. Ed. Yozo Moroya and Paul Hullah. Okayama, Japan: University Education Press, 1997, 70.
[38] Ex-Magpie Ruth Kingsbury.

diaries; Elias Canetti's 1993 reminiscence, which was sent me by his daughter Johanna exactly as I was finishing the first draft. Its malice dismayed me until my partner pointed out that it corroborated the picture already painted of Elias Canetti. Canetti also confirmed the central importance of those friends within her imaginative universe, whose portraits I had tried painstakingly to paint: Donald MacKinnon, Eduard Fraenkel, Arnoldo Momigliano, Franz Steiner, his own. He termed these her Transformations/*Verwandlungen* – a key word in his world of discourse, meaning something kin to *alter ego*. That Canetti was himself her most important *Verwandlung* had been my burden throughout. She created characters who were half Iris Murdoch, half not: rather as in her poetry album, where poems were sometimes literally co-written.

Among many letters, those coming from Iris's own generation mattered specially. The historian Dorothy Thompson, widow to E. P. Thompson, who ordinarily hates "instant biography" wrote thanking me for "explaining" her generation to her children and grandchildren. The historian Roy Foster, who wrote of the pleasure he took in the book in *The Scotsman*, pleased its author by praising the book's understanding of Irish history, and of Murdoch's relations with Ireland – perhaps biography *could be* cultural history! One curiosity was the felt need of many reviewers to display his or her proximity to Dame Iris, one reviewer including the distasteful boast that he had known her sufficiently well to have observed that she "washed herself like a cat."

The biographical task is never over. Two of Frank Thompson's school-fellows have written, and I now see Frank as wilder than the portrait in *Iris Murdoch: A Life*; he'll be less tame in any future edition, more like Pat Dumay [in *The Red and The Green*].

In May 2001, while the book was being "set," I read Iris's letters to Queneau. I discovered that in August 1952 – when my chapter had her involved with Franz Steiner and Arnoldo Momigliano – she had declared her love for Queneau. This discovery threw me, until my admirable editor Robert Lacey helped me decide how to include it. The Queneau letters seem to show that she finished her translation of *Pierrot*, albeit the second half in draft, which was rejected by John Lehman [in] November 1946, just as she was, in January 1954, translating Canetti's *The Comedy of Vanities* from German. This obviously strengthens the autobiographical element in her portrayal of Jake moving from translation to creation.

Peter J. Conradi
September 2002

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Bran Nicol: The Perfect Crime – Murdoch, Psychoanalysis and Authorship

Though increasingly important in the fields of philosophy, literary study and theology, Iris Murdoch's work has perhaps been neglected most of all among literary theorists. References to her thought are practically nowhere to be seen in contemporary literary-theoretical discourse. This is rather surprising, as her non-fiction develops a sustained theory of literary production (though theory is a term Murdoch herself was deeply suspicious about).

One explanation for the neglect is her perceived "unfashionableness." Contemporary literary theory is dominated by insights from French thinkers like Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan, all of whom, in their different ways, articulate the problems with a kind of universalist or essentialist thinking about categories like the human being, reality and truth. This kind of world view tends to be labeled (loosely and unsatisfactorily) "liberal humanism" by theorists. Murdoch's discussions of literature exhibit some of the hallmarks of liberal humanism: for example, its implication that "good" literature is of timeless importance, no matter its socio-historical context, and exists to advance "humane" values. The problem is exacerbated, to my mind, by the overall lack of specificity in Murdoch's discussions of literature. Even though she proved herself to be an excellent literary critic (see, for example, her reading of Sartre in her first book, or her discussions of *King Lear* and Proust in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*), Murdoch's discussion of literature tends to be generalized rhetoric rather than close analysis. One of the contradictions about Murdoch's literary theory is how it continually asserts the values of non-systematic criticism and of respecting the contingent, when it is itself binaristic and tends to overlook the differences between writers and texts.

Nevertheless, there are obvious areas of overlap between Murdoch's work and contemporary theory. She was always concerned with questions of otherness, difference and ethics, just as many contemporary theorists are now. More specifically, her theory is complex enough for theorists to "rescue" from its "liberal humanist" foundations a kind of "ethical poetics" of the novel – a formal taxonomy based on moral criteria, constructed in alignment with more overtly formalist theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin. But one of the things that most attracts me about her work is its continued grappling with impossibility. Murdoch was determined to represent contingency in writing, when of course the very act of representation renders what was once contingent significant. Similarly, she attempted to represent the accidental and even incorporate it in her fiction. Murdoch's philosophy and her ethics of fiction stress the value of respecting and representing otherness. However, as a number of theorists – Blanchot, Baudrillard, Derrida – have said, otherness is impossible to represent because the very act of representation renders it the same.

Another area where Murdoch's thought deals with the impossible is its preoccupation with the idea of impersonality in authorship. Considering this seems especially pertinent now because of the recent emergence of the "new" biographical persona of Iris Murdoch as a result of John Bayley's memoirs and Peter Conradi's biography. Where Murdoch had seemed mysteriously absent from her work, she now, suddenly, can be seen everywhere in it. This amounts to a serious challenge to what was perhaps her key aim as an author: to "expel" herself from her work. Murdoch's literary theory is founded upon what we might call an "ethics of impersonality," one which insists that the author must not be obviously "present" in her fiction. The writer must resist the temptation to give in to personal fantasy by featuring in her work herself or imposing pre-existing schema or judgement upon it. Characters should develop "independently" of the author and each other and not be subservient to the demands of the plot.

Striving for impersonality is not, of course, an unusual impulse in a twentieth-century author. Rather, the question of impersonality has been perhaps the most dominant feature of theories of authorship ranging from romanticism to modernism to "the death of the author." There are strong similarities between Murdoch's ethics of the novel and, for instance, Bakhtin's theory, which also argues for a kind of impersonality, the author ideally preserving a *distance* from his characters, which respects the inherent *heteroglossia* of the novel. Impersonality was central to the romantic philosophy of art: see, for example, Schiller's characterization of the "naïve" or classical poet as one who "flees the heart that seeks his, flees the desire that would embrace him" ("On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry"), Coleridge's claim that "to have a genius is to live in the universal, to know no self" (*The Philosophical Lectures*), or, most famously, Keats's notion of "negative capability," where the "poetical Character … has no self – it is every thing and nothing." Impersonality is also a governing impulse within modernism: in Flaubert's famous declaration that "the author in his work ought to be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere" (*Correspondence II*), or in Joyce's depiction of the artist as a "bored god, paring his fingernails" (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*).

Yet Murdoch's continual insistence on the value of self-expulsion lends it rather an extreme air, almost as if she is protesting a little too much. Indeed, it resembles the kind of excessive reaction that psychoanalysis would immediately regard as evidence of an eruption of desire. Rather like T. S. Eliot's notorious comment that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality"; there is a whiff of the pathological about Murdoch's continued insistence on the value of removing traces of herself from her fiction. There is, in other words, something oddly *personal* about both writers' theories of authorship and the language they use – to escape, to expel – as if the worlds of desire and supposedly objective literary criticism momentarily cross. The insistence on impersonality comes to appear as the product of a submerged obsession as much as a rational ethical principle.

The psychoanalytic terminology is not coincidental here because, it seems to me, there is something fundamentally psychoanalytic about Murdoch's theory of authorship. To begin with, the language of psychoanalysis is frequently invoked in her discussions of literature. In early polemical pieces like "The Sublime and the Good," "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited" and "Against Dryness," for example, Murdoch charges currents within contemporary fiction with indulging in fantasy or being "neurotic." Her counter theory, which she developed throughout the 1960s and 1970s, of preventing personal fantasy from dominating art, can be understood as a variation of the Freudian notion of sublimation, by which, in Murdoch's own words in *The Fire and the Sun*, "[t]he destructive power of the neurosis is foiled by art; the art object expresses the neurotic conflict and defuses it" (*Existentialists and Mystics*, 423). Indeed, Murdoch's theory of artistic production rests on a principle not unlike that which underpins much of Freud's writings on aesthetics, such as his 1907 essay "Creative Writers and

Daydreaming": art arises out of the effort to defuse our natural desires. Freud's paper is, for good reason, regarded as unsatisfactory because in arguing that creative writing is simply a matter of the writer using aesthetic form to present a disguised version of his or her own day-dreams, Freud falls into the trap that literature tutors tirelessly point out to their students: the dangers of regarding fiction as disguised autobiography. On another level, of course, Murdoch and Freud part company. For Freud, art remains a disguised expression of selfish impulses no matter its quality; for Murdoch, the better the art the further away it is from personal desire. Yet, fundamentally, Murdoch would seem to share Freud's view that the seductions of the unconscious – the artist's compulsions and fantasies – are never far away from artistic endeavour.

This idea is developed most clearly in *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch's most sustained engagement with Freudian theory. Here she expands on the rather general references to the dangers of "personal obsession" and "fantasy" in previous works and focuses on one particular kind of fantasy structure, which endangers artistic creation and masochism:

> A chief enemy to […] clarity of vision, whether in art or in morals, is the system to which the technical name of sado-masochism has been given. It is the peculiar subtlety of this system that, while constantly leading attention and energy back into the self, it can produce, almost all the way as it were to the summit, plausible imitations of what is good. Refined sado-masochism can ruin art which is too good to be ruined by the cruder vulgarities of self-indulgence. One's self is interesting, so one's motives are interesting, and the unworthiness of one's motives is interesting. (*Existentialists and Mystics*, 355)

This passage is not far from depicting authorship as an inherently perverse activity: whenever an author aims at clarity of vision, masochistic impulses are ready to derail the process. Artistic creation is presented here as nothing other than a struggle against masochism, the implication being that, if left to its own devices – without careful attention – art will naturally become an outlet for masochistic desire.

Psychoanalysis can also provide us with a way of understanding Murdoch's strategy for avoiding falling into this trap in her own fiction. Murdoch's two characteristic writing "selves," novelist and philosopher, function in her work like the ego and the superego in the psyche. That is, Murdoch's philosophical self advances an "official" theory of authorship (in her non-fiction writings – interviews, philosophy and literary criticism), which involves laying down injunctions, prohibitions and codes of behaviour. With all the characteristic rhetoric of the superego, this persona reminds Murdoch that the *good* author keeps herself out of her work, strives to create characters who are not indulgent versions of herself, and avoids imposing consoling pattern. The authorial self that actually writes the fiction is analogous to the ego trying to steer a course between the demands of the superego and the desires of the unconscious.

Equally, though, psychoanalysis can help us see why Murdoch's "ethics of impersonality" is really an impossible aim. For psychoanalysis, the whole impulse towards impersonality or disinterestedness is something to regard with suspicion. To strive for impersonality is a defence formation designed to protect the psyche from the excesses of the unconscious, of desire. As a result, paradoxically, it means that the very attempt to transcend or de-personalize one's situation is always to be returned to the personal. To emphasize the importance of "effacing" oneself from one's work is, strangely enough, to make the self more present than ever. A similar logic operates in sublimation: however far we manage to travel away from the unconscious, it always draws us back. In literature, the more one tries to efface oneself as author, the more obvious the strategies one uses become. As Harold Bloom says in *A Map of Misreading*, "meaning […] cleaves more closely to origins the more intensely it strives to distance itself from origins" (OUP 1975, 62). The more one tries to be impersonal, the more one's presence comes to seem transcendent. Or as Bradley Pearson puts it, "The author appears, however much he may imagine that he hides, in the revealed extension of his work" (*The Black Prince*, 12).

We can illustrate this by thinking, first of all, of the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet. In his experiments at producing fiction that stayed true to phenomenological theories of consciousness (for example in *Le Voyeur* or *La Jalousie*), Robbe-Grillet tries to remove the experiencing consciousness and produce pure fictional reality rendered directly, unmediated – as if it consisted of the recordings of a surveillance camera. But what happens in fact is that the reader can "recuperate" the text by imagining that it is reflective of a particular kind of consciousness – usually, as it happens, a psychopathological one. We can see something similar in the strategies Murdoch uses to efface herself from her fiction, especially in her efforts to produce moments of true accident in her fiction, which can provide the artistic equivalent of the

workings of chance in life by shattering the form of the work. An example is the sudden death of Harriet Gavender at the hands of terrorists at the end of *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. This event makes for a radical opening-out of the novel, beyond its previously closed domestic world. One could plausibly imagine that this development surprised Murdoch herself. But it is so outrageous a piece of plotting that it only serves to make Murdoch's role as the dominant creator figure even more obvious.

The dilemma is exemplified in *The Black Prince*, the Murdoch novel that explores the practice of authorship most deeply. On one level, the novel demonstrates Murdoch's ability to successfully represent otherness, as it is in one of the finest examples of her extraordinary, uncanny ability to masquerade as a certain kind of male subject. On another level, of course, the novel is the closest Murdoch comes to putting herself directly in her own fiction. As has been noted many times before, Arnold and Bradley can both be seen as caricatures of their creator: Bradley's puritanical theory of literary production is surely an ironic version of Murdoch's own, while Arnold Baffin's excessive writing is an ironic comment on Murdoch's own prolificity. The novel is Murdoch's most metafictional text, her most ironic and convoluted. At every level it seems to comment on itself. If we follow the logic established by the embedded diegetic layers of this text, does it not mean that whatever Bradley says of Shakespeare, in the tutorial scene with Julian, applies not only apply to himself but also to Iris Murdoch? Shakespeare "is at his most cryptic when he is talking about himself" (*The Black Prince*, 198), says Bradley. The artist "appears, however much he may imagine that he hides, in the revealed extension of his work" (*The Black Prince*, 12). The implication is that in *The Black Prince* Murdoch is performing an act just as daring, just as exhibitionist as Shakespeare did in *Hamlet*. And so she is, for this novel transgresses the injunctions laid down by her superego.

Murdoch's insistence on impersonality has the effect of defamiliarizing the impulse to remove oneself from one's art. Besides art (or an act of God, perhaps), what kind of activity involves creating something, going to all the trouble of planning, designing, preparing and executing it in laborious, tortuous detail, and then removing all traces of one's presence – or at least transforming one's presence so that one is unrecognizable? Crime is the answer that springs to mind. It is appropriate that the one Murdoch novel that tells the story of a perfect crime (Rachel Baffin's murder of her husband) should also be a "perfect crime" against her theory of authorship. It is a novel that works beautifully in spite of – indeed because of – contravening most of the injunctions laid down by her "superego": it is exquisitely patterned, the hero is manifested as a (heavily disguised) version of its author, who is incapable of seeing the other characters as anything other than props in his drama, and it contains an extended metafictional subtext which raises the kind of theoretical questions Murdoch usually preferred to leave to her non-fiction.

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George Soule: Review of *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* by Anne Rowe (Lewiston, NY: The Edward Mellen Press, 2002, ix, 215 pp)

Iris Murdoch gave critics so much to talk about that we cannot be surprised that many aspects of her novels have gone largely unnoticed. Critics tried, for example, to square what her novels said with her philosophy, while other approaches were slighted. Some attention was paid to her debts to other authors, mainly to Shakespeare by Richard Todd; Howard German identified allusions in her first ten novels; Darlene Mettler illuminated eight important works by discussing their references to music. But, except for the designers of the Penguin paperback covers, almost no one has attended to Murdoch's relation to the visual arts.

Anne Rowe makes up for this omission. Rowe notes that the young Murdoch considered becoming an art historian or a painter and that she was devoted to paintings all her life. Rowe considers the novels having the most important relation to paintings (and to one fountain): *Under the Net*, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *The Sandcastle*, *The Bell*, *A Severed Head*, *An Unofficial Rose*, *The Unicorn*, *The Time of the Angels*, *The Nice and the Good*, *A Fairly Honorable Defeat*, *The Black Prince*, *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, *Henry and Cato*, *The Sea, The Sea*, *The Good Apprentice*, and *The Green Knight.* Her admirable study provides black-and-white reproductions of the paintings to which she refers.

Rowe argues that considering relevant paintings will help us read each novel better. She is convincing when she distinguishes the different ways that paintings function. Allusions to Pre-Raphaelite and Surrealist art underline the obsessively self-centred perceptions of many characters in *The Flight from the Enchanter* and *The Good Apprentice*. Some paintings illustrate the "pictorial nature of inner consciousness, which is a battleground of images" – distorted ones and occasionally good ones. In *Under the Net*, looking at Hal's *The Laughing Cavalier* leads Jake to false conclusions. In *Henry and* Cato, Henry's liking for a Beckman painting shows his limitations. Yet in *The Bell*, Dora's ecstatic response to a Gainsborough painting releases her from solipsism into a partial knowledge of The Good.

Sometimes I found Rowe less convincing. Do Martin's Audubon prints in *A Severed Head* really make a joke about women as "birds"? Every reader will agree that if a painting is described in a novel, like Bronzino's *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time* in *The Nice and the Good*, a critic may use that description to interpret it. I wondered, however, if a critic may legitimately use *details* not mentioned in the novel and even details from *paintings* not so mentioned? And though the fictional study of Susannah by Tintoretto is important in *An Unofficial Rose*, can Rowe legitimately make interpretations based on a real painting by Tintoretto of *Susannah and the Elders* not described in the novel's text? Similarly, she uses Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* to talk about *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, even though the text does not mention this painting either.

Rowe soon convinced me to become less of a purist. In all these cases, her tactics pay off. Analogies to Audubon *do* illuminate *A Severed Head*. Considering the real Tintoretto painting defines Randall's failure in *An Unofficial Rose*; in his erotic fantasies he resembles Tintoretto's voyeur, a figure not in the fictional study.

Paintings make us recognize Murdoch's *ambiguity* – that is, viewing matters in a Shakespeare-like manner from multiple perspectives. For example, Rowe thinks Murdoch's commitment to saintly mystics is less complete than several recent books have maintained. Rowe finds that Murdoch gives significant allegiance to a much different figure: the soldier. In *Henry and Cato*, the fictional tapestry shows Athena's assertiveness as admirable, a quality that is echoed by the energetic Colette. *The Polish Rider* may not represent the whole of *The Green Knight*'s scheme of values, but his virtues are important and can help us judge the novel's characters. Yet Murdoch is always ambiguous, Rowe warns. How to take the ending of *Henry and Cato*, in which Colette and Henry pair off? "The degree of irony incorporated into Murdoch's benign and loving acceptance of the second best can only be guessed at." At one time or another most readers of Murdoch have entertained similar thoughts.

Rowe illustrates Murdoch's multiplicity by discussing *The Nice and the Good* and *The Black Prince*, novels in which painting is central. Others have noted how Paula reads Bronzino's *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time* differently at different times, but Rowe emphasizes how the painting's implications resonate throughout the novel. Critics of *The Black Prince* all note the myth in which Marsyas was flayed alive for losing a flute-playing contest with Apollo: Marsyas was punished for his hubris, much as Bradley will be in the story. Rowe argues convincingly that the novel refers not to the myth, but to Titian's painting *The Flaying of Marsyas*, which can be viewed only in the Czech Republic. In the painting, flaying can be seen as an act of love: Marsyas's face shows intense joy. (The Penguin [dust cover]designers unhelpfully reproduce a very tame picture of the two figures by Perugino.) Although a great deal of the suffering in *The Black Prince* is destructive, perhaps Bradley's suffering, even if it seems masochistic, is at least partially joyous and redemptive. As in her analysis of *The Nice and the Good*, Rowe also finds Murdoch's multiple perspectives here: "low" eros can be destructive, but it is necessary to achieve not perfection but a partial experience of "high" eros or moral perfection or the Good – which is as much as humans can hope for.

Even though here, as in her discussion of *An Unofficial Rose*, Rowe uses material not found in the novel, I again want to grant her this right. Titian's picture was one of Murdoch's favorites, and she chose it for the background of her portrait in the National Portrait Gallery.

Rowe's last chapter treats "Salvation by Art." This phrase may mean that looking at a painting gives one practise in the attentiveness that Murdoch (after Simone Weil) always recommends. More importantly, responding to art can produce effects that work towards the good. Dora's innocent response to Gainsborough works within her as she progresses through *The Bell*. (Responding can produce bad effects as well; see the effect of the Russian icon in *The Time of the Angels*.)

In *The Sea, The Sea*, the dangers of Charles's obsessions are mirrored in the gaping mouth of the dragon he actually sees in the sea, a vision influenced by the dragon's mouth in Titian's *Perseus and Andromeda* he had seen at the Wallace Collection. Aided by his deepening understanding of Titian's painting, Charles achieves some serenity by the novel's end. Here again, destructive forces can be made

positive: “paranoid obsession, recognized and differently focused, can be transformed into positive regenerative energy.” Although this is not Christian salvation and is partial at best, Rowe wants to call it a kind of salvation. My readings of Murdoch have produced such effects that I would not object to that word.

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Barbara Heusel: Review of Iris Murdoch Special Issue, edited by David Herman (*Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 47, No. 3, Fall 2001)

The *Modern Fiction Studies* special issue on Iris Murdoch’s novels (Fall 2001) is not the first; the journal published a similar special issue in the Autumn of 1969. The difference in the subject matter measures the progress Murdoch criticism has made in thirty-two years. Generally, the first collection emphasized Murdoch’s pattern making: myths, allusions, and leitmotivs. The more recent special issue is not only a tribute to Murdoch, who died in 1999, but also an evaluation of her accomplishments and her effect on twentieth-century fiction. The more recent publication focuses on the inconsistencies between her critical statements about the kind of fiction she wanted to create and literary critics’ perceptions of the fiction she published. The extent to which Murdoch’s philosophical ideas structure her fiction is the first concern; the extent to which she had blind spots about her use of homosexuality, feminism, and totalizing systems is the second. The seven contributors, from the USA, the UK and India, point to these areas. Some also emphasize the blind spots of Murdoch’s critics in their effort to fabricate neat patterns.

In his introduction, editor David Herman spells out the way he shaped the issue, writing that the contributors “reveal multiple, systematic interconnections between Murdoch’s oeuvre and developments in literary, philosophical, and cultural contexts” (552). In other words, while Murdoch was writing her last 14 novels (since 1969), her critics were absorbing the cultural context of the time – particularly the writings of Derrida, Foucault, Bakhtin, and Kristeva – and searching for relationships between these ideas and her subsequent novels. Herman places the problem he considers major at the beginning of the issue: essays by Michael Levenson, Bran Nicol, and A. E. Denham voice a range of views on the relationship between her philosophical writing and her fiction; all insist philosophy is an important ingredient. Katherine Weese and W. S. Hampl focus on recent cultural concerns. Weese argues that Murdoch accomplishes postmodern experimentation while remaining a realist and Hampl maintains that Murdoch does not portray homosexuals realistically. A problem with the shape of the issue is Herman’s having skimmed over his reasons for including an unpublished 1987 interview by S. B. Sagare, in which Murdoch simply reiterates what she had already said a dozen times. Given that this interview adds virtually nothing to the critical understanding of Murdoch’s writing, Herman’s calling it “the capstone of this special issue" (557) might be his own blind spot. Granted, a much later interview might have added new details to the critical conversation and might have shed light on the state of Murdoch’s memory while she was writing *Jackson’s Dilemma* (1995). Cutting through to the heart of concerns about Murdoch’s “realism, consistency, and memory” (556), Richard Todd’s article challenges critics’ misreading of that novel (due in part, he thinks, to a biographical comment by John Bayley).

The first essay, Levenson’s “Iris Murdoch: The Philosophic Fifties and *The Bell*,” uses the 1958 novel to ground the reader in a post-World War II historical context. Whereas Oxford linguistic philosophers were examining a behaviorist point of view, Murdoch, who had spent time in France absorbing Existentialism’s focus on inner experience, had a much more inclusive worldview. Levenson makes clear, however, that for Murdoch, Existentialism was no panacea because it led to solipsism, a hindrance to freedom, which Murdoch defined as “an ongoing appreciation of alterity” (552). His role in the issue is to recognize that her older and much more professionally powerful colleagues at Oxford appeared to be blind to the moral problems that had evolved out of the holocaust.

Levenson’s and Denham’s essays argue that Murdoch does not eschew philosophy in her novels. Whereas Nicol goes so far as to say that Murdoch, even in her struggle to eliminate philosophy from her fiction, has unconsciously allowed philosophical systems to creep in, Denham, a philosopher holding the same Fellowship in Philosophy at St Anne’s College that Murdoch held, explores the compatibility between her philosophy and her fiction. Nicol throws out the challenge, and Denham answers it in “Envisioning the Good: Iris Murdoch’s Moral Psychology” with Murdoch’s philosophy of love. Denham’s

essay, mainstream in that she reiterates what many critics have already said, is quite useful to Murdoch readers because as a philosopher she gives concrete philosophical explanations. Although she does not mention Murdoch's frequently quoted interview in Caen, France, with Jean-Louis Chevalier in 1978, Denham apparently agrees with the position Murdoch stated there, that she is a moral psychologist: her philosophical thinking led to staging moral problems in fiction "instead of trying to propound rules … she focused on developing naturalistic moral psychology" (554). Seeing the dilemmas Murdoch's characters face, Denham argues, is like encountering those of Antigone and Hamlet: "you have no vested interest in distorting and veiling the true nature of what you observe; here your desires need not drive your beliefs …" (627). Murdoch says art "transforms our experience into something we can love without illusions" – "this is no small part of what it is to perceive the Good" (627).

Nicol's cogent essay, "Philosophy's Dangerous Pupil: Murdoch and Derrida," will have the most long-lasting effect of any of the contributions on the direction of Murdoch criticism: the controversies it addresses can yield rich analyses for years to come. This essay in particular drives home the reality that Murdoch will make no more pronouncements, and critics can now focus on the texts. His interest is in Murdoch's internal contradictions, which help her to create her dialectical or polyphonic view of reality. He has suggested some of the reasons why Murdoch became emotional when Derrida's name came up: Murdoch found Derrida a necessary antagonist in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, where she deconstructs his ideas. Critics must now interrogate these claims and others Nicol makes. Here are two of the most arguable: rather than creating contingency in her novels, Murdoch creates "an idea of contingency"; rather than achieving the particular in her texts, she only talks about its value (592). On the other hand, many critics would say that this statement does apply to *The Black Prince* – "so while there is undoubtedly a degree of carnivalesque polyphony, the author's voice retains the final authoritative word" (596) – but that Nicol's concluding that she desires both to totalize and "to reflect what is irreducible and particular" (598) is unorthodox. He uses Joyce Carol Oates to proffer this controversial claim about Murdoch: "because she is a Platonist the ideas in the novels are more real than the everyday world she seeks to depict" (597). In spite of his revolutionary claims, Nicol reiterates what some critics have argued since Murdoch called herself a Wittgensteinian neo-Platonist:[39] "contradictions, paradoxes, aporias," the "clash […] of irreconcilable impulses in her mind" drive the novels (598).

Weese's essay tries a new approach, utilizing *The Sea, The Sea* as an "intersection of feminist theories and theories of the fantastic" (630). She cites Todorov's category of the fantastic – the moment at which the reader cannot determine "whether seemingly supernatural events depicted in fiction are meant to be taken as real in a world with its own sets of laws … or whether naturalistic explanations account for these events"(630–31) – to explain Murdoch's strategy in the novel of creating a sea monster and a scene of death and rebirth. Murdoch transforms the fantastic of the Gothic novel to ensure that the reader and the characters will have to "scrutinize," according to Anne Cranny-Francis, "the categories of the patriarchal real" (quoted in Herman, 631). In addition, Murdoch's novel, just like "the Gothic[,] self-consciously explores the connection between the romance plot and the social construction of both masculinity and femininity" (634).

Contrary to the praise Murdoch's writing has garnered for representing homosexuality realistically, Hampl's essay, "Desires Deferred: Homosexual and Queer Representations in the Novels of Iris Murdoch," argues that real homosexuals do not behave the way Murdoch's homosexual characters do; hers are "pals, not partners" (659). Her habit is to defer the homosexual sex act, creating only chaste characters. Perhaps more important than his criticism is his praise of Murdoch for "courageously offer[ing] a new understanding of the configurations of a queer family" (666) in *The Green Knight* (1993). Quoting David Halperin's definition of *queer*, Hampl says it is "*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (666). After contending that homosexuality in her earlier novels is artificial, he finds what he considers growth in *The Green Knight*, admitting not only that Murdoch avoids "stereotypical homosexual hysteria" (658) when the long-term relationship of Clive and Emil disintegrates but that in the conclusion a real homosexual relationship is possible for the two. A weakness for some readers might be Hampl's acceptance of John Bayley's somewhat dismissive remark about Murdoch's naïveté about homosexuality.

Perhaps the most positive essay in the volume is Todd's "Realism Disavowed? Discourses of Memory and High Incarnations in *Jackson's Dilemma*." Warning that "both writer and work suffer

[39] Jean-Louis Chevalier, ed. *Recontres avec Iris Murdoch*. Caen: Centre des Recherches de Litterature at Linguistique des Pays de Langue Anglaise, 1978, 90.

diminishment when careful assumption replaces thoughtful attention" (674), Todd counters the view that Murdoch had already begun to lose her memory when she was writing *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995). Before readers of *Iris: A Memoir* (1998) found this view in John Bayley's musings about her Alzheimer's, "[t]he problem was first described in 1996 in the international press as 'writer's block'" (675). Todd hypothesizes, however, that the novel was already "largely … written or even completed," when Murdoch mentioned to Bayley, "looking back on that character" Jackson, that for her Jackson's image was slowly fading. For Todd, Murdoch's remark does not suggest that she is still "gestating a character" (688). Looking at the historical record, he has discovered that critics who first read the novel noticed that it was short and contained flaws, but was "quintessential Murdoch" (676). The reviews ranged from praising its "great beauty" to explaining that, although "a psychologically rich tale [the] writing is a mess" to bemoaning its "troubling formlessness" (677–78). Todd shows that the novel is anything but formless, and, furthermore, it is so thoroughly "mysterious that it invites readings that seem inappropriately to confuse the cerebral condition of its writer with the deliberate aesthetic of imperfection her work offers" (692). He suggests that one of Murdoch strategies is to bury imperfections in the text to trip up her reader, a literary strategy Lorna Sage explained in her 1977 essay on Murdoch's "aesthetic of imperfection" (679). Citing three inconsistencies, Todd's essay concludes that the focalizer character, rather than the omniscient narrator or Murdoch, is often the one failing to remember and causing the inconsistencies. Todd asks "whether a dispersal with or dissipation of any need for consistency in a presentation of the contingent or circumstantial stuff of life, what Sage terms '[a mocking] of the critical demand for totalities, [making] fiction seem a living process (68),' is taking place" (680–81). He insists that Murdoch was particularly acute when she wrote *Jackson's Dilemma*, perhaps taking a new tack, or more importantly finally fulfilling her lifetime goal: "Murdoch comes closer in this novel than perhaps anywhere else to realizing the 'peripheral' character; to managing the astonishing achievement, in a deliberately short novel, of pulling it apart; and to surrounding that achievement with a mysteriousness for which all too few readers were prepared to give her credit" (685). That conclusion represents precisely the kind of "more discerning argument" that Todd argues "can be distilled from some of the more intelligent [early] responses" (676). His essay stands as a call for more criticism along these rigorous lines and less dependence on biographical details, particularly those rendered in the aftermath of great personal loss.

Just as in 2002 the most authoritative Murdoch critics were still quoting from the 1969 special issue, present readers recognize the long-range importance of the *Modern Fiction Studies* 2001 special issue, assuming that it contains a rich store of questions for Murdoch's critics to address. This special issue sets up enough problems in Murdoch criticism to fuel hundreds of dissertations between now and the centenary of Murdoch's birth.

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Rachel Zuckert: Review of *Natural Goodness* by Phillipa Foot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 125 pp)

To readers of Murdoch's *Sovereignty of the Good*, Phillipa Foot's *Natural Goodness* may seem like a variation on similar themes, arising out of, and in resistance to, a shared (Wittgensteinian) tradition. Like Murdoch, Foot begins with G. E. Moore's seminal argument that the question – what is good? – ought to be distinguished from questions – what things are good? – and with criticism of subjectivist claims about moral value (for example, that the claim that something is good is to be understood as expressing an agent's disposition to act). The moral good, Foot argues, is not a matter of individual, subjective preferences, pleasures, or dispositions, but is objective, the subject matter of universal, true claims, recognized and acted upon by the truly good individual.

Also like Murdoch, Foot models her alternative "framework" for moral philosophy on ancient sources. Foot's inspiration is, however, not Plato but Aristotle. The morally good is, Foot argues, the *natural* goodness of human beings, and, like the good of plants and animals, can be determined objectively, for it constitutes a "natural norm." Just as deep roots in an oak are good and swiftness in a deer is good, because of the kinds of beings they are, so too are promise-keeping, loyalty, friendship, generosity, kindness, etc. good in human beings good, since these virtues render an individual a worthy member of our

kind. Moral evaluation of human beings will, indeed, concern qualities of human beings that are not shared by animals or plants, but the qualities of animals or plants also differ from one another; in all of these judgments, however, we employ the "same structural terminology … of goodness or defect relating to parts, characteristics, and operations, … of] 'function' and 'purpose'" (*Natural Goodness*, 41). Thus, Foot argues (contra Murdoch and Moore) that there is "no change in meaning of 'good' between the word as it appears in 'good roots' and as it appears in 'good dispositions of the human will'" (39).

Foot thus proposes a timely, ambitious naturalist ethic, one that challenges long-standing distinctions in moral philosophy – given their strongest articulation by Kant, perhaps – not only of the moral good from the natural good, but also of the moral good from other human aims or from human fulfillment. That is, the (moral) goodness of a human being is not to be understood narrowly as the fulfillment of obligations, amenability to certain moral rules, or as self-sacrifice in conflict with one's own fulfillment. Rather, moral goodness pervades human activity; the morally good life is a life of deep fulfillment, even, perhaps, of happiness. Following Aquinas (via Anscombe), Foot argues that moral evaluation concerns a specific class of human behavior, but that this class is much broader than philosophers have claimed: moral evaluation concerns "goodness or defect *of the rational will*" (72) and therefore concerns (all) voluntary actions done with knowledge, and for purposes. Such actions are, Foot suggests, judged good or bad according to the goodness or badness of the action itself, its end, *and* the relation of this action to the agent's conscience. Thus, saving a life is a good action, but if it is done for bad ends (for example, a kidnapper who saves his victim's life in order to extort ransom) or if it is done against the agent's conscience (for example, a soldier who saves the life of an enemy despite his judgment that this action is contrary to his duty), such an action (and the agent who performs it) is bad. Good action, Foot argues, is any voluntary action that is not bad: "in the absence of any defect [the will, just like a living being] will … be said to be good in its operation, just as a normal, healthy child will come to have what we call good balance, to walk well, to talk well, and to relate well to other children" (76). In some bad circumstances (Foot's examples are almost always of Nazi Germany), for example where one must sacrifice one's life or loved ones for the sake of justice, avoiding badness of the various kinds may be difficult, or full self-fulfillment may be impossible. But such cases are not to be understood as conflicts between morality and fulfillment, but as cases in which a fully satisfactory life or the full realization of human "natural goodness" is not possible.

Foot recognizes that her proposals are controversial, and attempts – in clear and lively prose – to respond to objections that might be raised. This reader was, however, left unsatisfied. To objections that it may be unclear what the universal, natural human good might be (given, for example, culturally varying conceptions of the good), and that human beings – unlike animals or plants – are rational and therefore can question "natural" norms as standards of the good life, Foot responds by begging the question, that is, by asserting (respectively) that all of us *can* identify factors that would "deprive" a human life of "goodness" (for example, cruelty, lack of humor, lack of vocal chords, or the refusal to use one's talents to benefit society), and that true human rationality *is* the recognition of the "naturally good." Moreover, Foot – unlike Aristotle – writes at a time in which biology is understood, increasingly, in non-teleological terms, where it is unclear that there is a single, set, "natural good," even for other species. Thus, without more attention and response to contemporary biology and philosophy of biology – Foot relies on one, tendentious article by Michael Thompson – the appeal to "natural" goods, especially as grounds for evaluation beyond "fitness" to survive or reproduce, is unpersuasive. And one requires some persuasion to adopt a moral theory, according to which standing up to the Nazis and drinking a glass of wine at a party are, for the same reason, morally good. This work may, in sum, be of interest to readers of Murdoch as a different response to similar worries about moral subjectivism, but may also disappoint, because of its very un-Murdochian complacency about our knowledge of, and abilities to realize, the Good.

Rachel Zuckert
Rice University

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Martin Corner: Review of *Iris Murdoch for Beginners* by Bran Nicol (New York and London: Writers and Readers, 2001, $11.95/£7.99,134 pp)

Bran Nicol's book takes its place in the well-established "*For Beginners*" series, which uses what the publishers describe as "documentary comic book" format to provide fast entry into an area of conceptual complexity: philosophical or historical or religious. This involves an essay of roughly 12,000 words, distributed on the page between mildly joky illustrations and laid out to break up the intimidating effect of text.

The form has certain implications, chiefly that its subjects – Foucault, Chomsky and Derrida alongside Murdoch – are simultaneously objects of general curiosity and seen to be obscure and inaccessible. People want to know, but don't have the time or the background or the confidence to direct the exploration themselves. For Murdoch to arrive in such a series says something about her broad cultural standing: that many whose acquaintance with her work is partial or non-existent want to know why she should be of importance and interest.

Nicol's book provides a first approximation to an answer. It covers, with slightly breathtaking economy, the biography, the writing, the historical context for life and thought, and the philosophy. The last is the book's real focus, as might be expected in what is largely a "great thinkers" series; and Nicol not only knows the material well but can spot in advance the points at which an inexperienced reader of Murdoch might be inclined to lose heart and fall before the intellectual complexity of her work. His method is to take nothing for granted; space is given to brief accounts of Plato, moral philosophy, existentialism, and metaphysics. Nicol has a gift for summary, and it is always clear how these contexts mesh with the preoccupations of her thinking and writing. For a novelist whose intellectual hinterland is so extensive, this introductory framing is well done.

Alongside the text, the pictures might not be felt to add very much, though speech-bubbles allow Murdoch's voice to be heard, directly or in paraphrase. This is a relatively painless way of getting quotations into an essay, though they have to compete with the jokiness of these insertions (Bentham: "Still happy, John?"; Mill: "Ecstatic, Jeremy. Fancy a sandwich?") All this helps not to frighten people off.

Nevertheless, the pictorial format does exact something of a price by forcing the author rather too relentlessly toward simplification. There is, for example, on page 114 a five-bullet-point "summary of Murdoch's philosophy," a summary that her picture endorses as she is made to say, "here's how to use my philosophy as a guidebook to living!" Though not false, the blunt statements that follow tend to convey the impression that the processes and conclusions of philosophy can properly be represented in definitive statement rather than as argument. As one reads, the anxiety grows that much of this book is going to find its way into a certain kind of competent, efficient undergraduate essay, where what are disputable judgements appear as universally acknowledged truths.

Nicol, to be fair, does try to protect Murdoch against this transmutation. He acknowledges, for example, that her interest in people goes well beyond those who enact or exemplify her convictions, that the variety of her humanity is not constrained by the dictates of a system. The bias of the book's format swings toward the cut-and-dried and the settled, however, and it is very hard within this frame to convey how Murdoch's fiction deliberately dissolves explicit fixities, or how often her writing works to create states of genuine uncertainty, out of which we must compose the vital judgements for ourselves. Murdoch's sense of the complexity of the human world preserves her always from the "here's how to use" kind of thinking; it may, perhaps, be the crucial distinction between the philosopher and the novelist that the novelist always knows the fragility of all systematized understandings, however lucidly and persuasively set out.

Martin Corner
Kingston University

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Anthony O. Edmunds: Review of *Iris*, directed by Richard Eyre (Miramax Films, 2001)

This is an engrossing film about "Iris Murdoch" and her struggle with Alzheimer's disease. Actually, in spite of the title, it is equally about "Iris's" husband, "John Bayley," and *his* struggle with her Alzheimer's. I don't mean to be coy with my use of quotation marks; they make a serious point. Although it is interesting to note that the main characters are real people and that the film is based on real memoirs by John Bayley, the power and beauty of this production stand independent of the "realness" of its people. Indeed, those who are intimately familiar with the real Iris Murdoch – John Bayley and the various friends who orbited around them (around Iris especially) – might well say, "It's not them, after all. They're just actors."

But so what? Bayley's memoirs aren't "them" either. We are dealing with representations, and the issue for me is: how well does this film tell a story of love and coping between two rather unusual members of the Western intellectual elite in the later half of the twentieth century? My response, as a professional historian and educated layperson in the world of film and Murdoch, is "Quite well."

On the structural level, *Iris* moves ingeniously between past and present. Scenes alternate and flow into each other with effective transitions: doors opening; a powerful woman outdistancing her husband/lover as a writer and on a bicycle; and above all a swimmer, young and nude or old and clothed. What could have been clichés are in fact effective visual devices illustrating the seamlessness of life, as present and past parallel and echo each other.

On the emotional level, the film is a tearjerker of the most satisfying kind. Early on, we see Iris giving a talk extolling freedom of the mind in almost religious tones. And one of the early signs of her Alzheimer's occurs when she is lovingly talking about languages and words. Later, we see the departure of that freedom, those words. Scraps of sentences, maybe a few recognitions, and a powerful split second of lucidity, when she says, "I write," are enormously touching. Watching John Bayley deal with Iris's descent is equally moving. We feel her husband's shifting moods of affection, love, anger and frustration. Although some of my colleagues fear that Bayley takes the film (and memoir) away from Iris, I see them as partners in what is finally a love story.

Most reviewers of the film have praised the acting, especially by Judy Dench and Jim Broadbent as the older Iris and John. These performances are stellar (although one of my colleagues who knew Murdoch argues that Dench is splendid but "NOT Iris!"). Kate Winslett and Hugh Bonneville as the younger Iris and John do well enough. But a major unacknowledged star of the film is that horribly cluttered house in North Oxford. Students in a Ball State class I audited last year read *Elegy for Iris*. They could not believe that the Murdoch/Bayley home was such a horrendous mess! "No one as smart as they could possibly live like that," more than one of these clean-cut Midwesterners proclaimed. Then they watched the film. The carefully planned visual chaos created by the set director left the students gaping and believing. In ways that no book could do, the film makes the mess live and affirms that such physical disorder can be irrelevant in the lives of powerful minds.

Iris is hardly perfect. Personally, I found Bonneville's studied dorkiness a bit artificial. The film drags in places, paradoxically, even though it is terribly compressed. What is missing as we shift from the relatively deep past to the immediate "present" is that vast middle, when Iris Murdoch wrote most of her books. We get little if any sense of Murdoch as a profound thinker and artist, although, to be fair, that would be very difficult to pull off in a film that self consciously focuses on Iris as a victim of a debilitating disease that cruelly trumps the thinking and the writing.

For me, these small flaws pale when I think back to my favourite scene. We see the suffering Iris and the suffering John in the midst of their disaster of a sitting room; Iris is intently watching *Teletubbies*, a television show for small children. John is looking at Iris, half appalled at how far she has declined, half glad that she has found something to make her happy. Irony, love and tragedy intermix in this moment as well as throughout this splendid film about two people who are, finally, in spite of their fame, wit and eccentricity, much like all of us.

Tony Edmonds
Professor of History
Ball State University

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Meeting of the Iris Murdoch Society in 2002

The 2002 Meeting of the Iris Murdoch Society was held on February 21, 2002. This followed the Murdoch session at the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference at the University of Louisville, Kentucky. Barbara Heusel chaired the panel on "Art, Architecture and Philosophy in Murdoch's Writing." Abstracts of papers presented by the panel follow.

ABSTRACTS: Papers from the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, Louisville, Kentucky

"The Riches to be Found in Murdoch's Holograph Notebooks at Iowa City" by Barbara Heusel

The majority of the holograph notebooks for Iris Murdoch's twenty-six novels are housed at the University of Iowa, Special Collections. The Special Collections department continues to buy Murdoch material as it becomes available. The documents are invaluable as records of the way this genius's mind worked. Slides of Iowa's hidden treasures reveal some of Murdoch's most basic writing processes. This helps readers draw conclusions about her focus and her goals, which often baffle readers.

Murdoch's notebooks are similar to those that the character Bradley Pearson, a novelist, buys in *The Black Prince*. Her practice, as she said to me in an interview, was to put off writing anything down "until I have invented the whole thing … I think the period of reflection – when one has nothing except notes, of course, to remind one – is very important; it's a kind of deep free reflection which may be more difficult later on." Following this reflection she writes out a relatively complete first version of the novel in as many notebooks as it takes: 4 for the very early novels to 12–16 for the later ones. She always rewrites the entire novel in a new group of notebooks, revising thoroughly.

Her habit when she opens a fresh notebook is to write the title and the date and place on the first inside page. After the title page, she appears to empty the workings of an active, over-full mind on the following few pages. She begins writing the story on the recto (right-hand side) and always saves the verso (left-hand side) for notes to herself. She might write 10–14 pages, or a scene, at one time. She apparently stops after a chunk and goes back to make notes (on the verso) about changes. The various methods that she uses as she starts a new novel include listing chapters and the events in each chapter or sometimes simply spilling out unorganized preliminary working notes for as many as 6 pages. On the verso are notes, queries, and instructions to herself (such as "cut this rot!") and notes about revision: proposing additions, deletions, and goals. Murdoch also includes drawings of animals and buildings, maps, and diagrams as she works out ways to arrange rooms in houses or gardens on an estate. Other bits of history about her writing process manifest themselves in Iowa's collection of her novels' dust jackets. Murdoch worked closely with her publisher, Chatto & Windus, to see that these materials would illustrate her pervasive themes.

"Iris Murdoch, Emanuel Levinas, and the Writing of Ethical Alterity" by J. Robert Baker

In "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," Iris Murdoch declares, "A novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in; and to combine form with a respect for reality with all its odd contingent ways is the highest art of prose" (271). When Murdoch wrote these words in 1959, she had already published four novels and, as a well-established Oxford don, she had begun to work out a philosophy that emphasizes the difference between human beings, and the connection between art and morality. In that philosophy, Murdoch underscores the distinction of the self from the Other, who does not necessarily share the same character as the self: "others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves" ("The Sublime and the Good," 52). Murdoch also stresses the need for the human person to try to see reality as it is. This, for Murdoch, is the process of acquiring virtue; it is the aim of morality. She connects art with morality, seeing it as a means of contemplating a reality separate and distinct from the self. The acquisition of virtue requires freedom, which Murdoch associates with choice, with the human will. The free person chooses to let go of his or her own predispositions and views, in an attempt to encounter reality as it is. As such, it involves letting go of the ego and its insistence on control. "Freedom, we find out, is not an inconsequential chucking of one's weight about, it is the disciplined overcoming of self" (*The Sovereignty of the Good*, 95).

Murdoch's philosophical and critical writings are often used to gloss her novels but, in fact, her near contemporary and fellow philosopher Emanuel Levinas may provide a more precise view of the moral action traced in Murdoch's novels. Both Murdoch and Levinas depart from Kant in emphasizing the opacity and difference of persons. Murdoch is largely interested in the relation between art and morals, but Levinas focuses more intently on the relation between the individual self and the Other. Levinas observes that the Other cannot be subsumed or reduced to the self's needs, assumptions, or knowledge. "Our relation with the other (autrui)," he writes, "certainly consists in wanting to comprehend him, but this relation overflows comprehension" ("Is Ontology Fundamental?", 6). The Other is so different that he or she can be met only on his or her own terms. For Levinas, ethics has less to do with cultivating goodness than with responding to the Other as he or she is. The ethical response to this radical alterity is, according to Levinas, an acceptance that entails accountability. The self must assume responsibility for an Other, even though the self is not responsible and even though there may be no reciprocity or mutuality in the self's relation with the Other.

Murdoch assumes that there is an objective or realistic vision that one can work toward, through the practice of virtue or the appreciation of art and the natural world. Levinas takes a different tack, suggesting that if there is an objective vision, it remains beyond the capacity of the human self because the Other exceeds the self's capacity to see, to know, or to understand the Other. Nonetheless, he lays out an ethic that demands that the ego be set aside as far as possible.

In Murdoch's novels, the characters generally do not come to a moral response to Others through art, but through the taking of responsibility that Levinas cites as central to ethical alterity. Those characters who survive the manipulations of people absorbed in their own egos are those who do attend to the reality of others or who grow to that attention through painful work. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, for example, Axel comes to see that Simon's difference, his camp effeminacy, is part of the reality of the man he loves, and so Axel comes to love the very difference that has disturbed and distressed him earlier in the novel.

"Equivocating the Good" by Anne Rowe

This paper argues that Murdoch's use of paintings equivocates the view of Goodness most usually identified by critics as typically "Murdochian." It begins by referring to some unease about the nature of Iris's seemingly limitless tolerance, which is voiced by John Bayley in his Memoir. He speculates that her Christ-like self-negation might imply the desire for a "wanton exercise of power over [herself]" or a "the willing participation as victim." The paper then looks at the way in which Murdoch herself reveals such a suspicion that the idea of selflessness is a masquerade for cowardice or masochism in *The Green Knight*. It explores how two conceptions of Goodness vie for supremacy as characters are variously identified as "saints" and "soldiers," and how a network of imagery links these characters to Rembrandt's *The Polish Rider*. The link between novel and painting reveals Murdoch's fears of how role models can be too easily manipulated to serve illusions of grandeur, and she acknowledges, by means of this dialogue with *The Polish Rider*, that her own conceptions of goodness may be as deluded as those of her characters. The paper proceeds to explore the relationship between the representation of the character of Moy in this novel and Murdoch herself, and argues that the representation of Moy suggests that Murdoch unashamedly acknowledges that a central facet of her own philosophy may well be sentimentalized. Finally, the paper identifies Moy's two sisters, Aleph and Sefton, as other alter egos for Murdoch. The construction of Aleph suggests other dangers in her conceptions of Goodness and Sefton represents an ideal of Goodness that is rather different to that which is most usually identified by critics.

"Architecture and the Built Environment in Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince*" by Cheryl Bove

As M. Christine Boyer argues in *The City of Collective Memory* (London: MIT Press, 1994), the meaning of a monument is not static; it changes with time and use, so that past forms are re-presented in our present visual constructions. In addition to the built environment, our vision of the city is layered with memory and shared history. This process can readily be seen in the reader's perception of the City in Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net* and in her use of the Post Office Tower as monument in *The Black Prince*.

Readers vicariously participate in Jake's comprehension of the City through Murdoch's fine and detailed narration of the pub-crawl in *Under the Net*; however, individual perceptions of the area are colored by unreliable memory and expectation. Not only are the present churches physically different from Wren's designs, but Wren's panoramic effects and his desired street perspectives have been destroyed by infill. Yet Murdoch brilliantly captures public monument and memory in her presentation of the City churches in this novel. The steeples and towers are viewed from the Holborn Viaduct, a dramatic viewpoint *above* the steeples that affords a comprehensive view of the area. Her vocabulary and her use of simile in describing Farringdon Street evoke both the history of the River Fleet and the combined memory of nearly every Londoner: "Farringdon Street swept below us like a dried-up river" (*Under the Net*, 91). Holborn Viaduct, now a conduit for water through the City, is also the highest point in the district, and this description reminds us that the viaduct was built to bridge the valley of the old Fleet River. Furthermore, the 1950s City of the novel had not yet been rebuilt following the World War II bombing. History and individual memory are at work when Jake and his friends sit down in the deep grass in what "had once been the nave of St Leonard Foster" (*Under the Net*, 103). Even the views that they notice when passing St Nicholas Cole Abbey evoke memory: these are the vistas that would have been opened on the south by the construction of Queen Victoria Street between 1861 and 1871 (R. G. Ellen, *A London Steeplechase*, City Press, 1972, 86).

Public sculpture and particular landmarks also evoke emotional responses from Murdoch's characters and her readers. The use of spatial concepts and theory associated with the Gothic can be seen in *The Black Prince*. The psychological effect of height in architecture involves a sense of the overpowering that is associated with the sublime. One of Murdoch's favorite images of awareness involves the Kantian notion of the sublime: awe inspired by the recognition of the power of nature. This sublimity is transferred to the built environment through verticality. Murdoch employs this connotation playfully and symbolically in *The Black Prince* through Bradley Pearson's association with the Post Office Tower; it dominates Pearson's psyche and also dominates his space, literally blocking the other views from his building. Even Pearson's heterosexual encounters with Rachel and Julian Baffin make reference to the Tower.

These diverse examples indicate that Murdoch uses architectural space to reinforce her themes and to promote her aesthetic theory. Her London-specific novels involve Murdoch's readers significantly in their shared memory, and often infuse a significance of place in that shared memory.

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Editorial Column

The first annual conference of the Iris Murdoch Society was held at St Anne's College, Oxford, on Saturday, September 14, 2002. More than 80 people attended, with representatives from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, France, Spain, Germany and the USA. Papers were given by Professor Peter Conradi (Murdoch's Biographer), who spoke about Murdoch, Freud and multiplicity; Dr Bran Nicol from Portsmouth University, who spoke about Murdoch and the art of authorial disguise; Priscilla Martin from St Edmund Hall, Oxford, who considered Iris Murdoch's treatment of time in *The Bell* in relation to T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*; and Alison Denham, Fellow and Tutor at St Anne's, who gave a paper on Murdoch's moral psychology. Conradi's and Nicol's papers are included in this issue. John Bayley attended and warmly welcomed the audience; St Anne's provided a splendid lunch, and the occasion itself provided many Murdoch enthusiasts with the opportunity to discuss her work with other interested parties. Although there were some problems with acoustics in the hall itself, the conference was a very successful start to what we hope will become an established event. We wish to particularly thank Jan Skinner, Jane Slaymaker and Jane Whitfield for their efforts in making this conference so successful.

For a variety of reasons, the organizers have decided that it will not be possible to hold another conference in 2003, but planning is already underway for September 2004. The venue is more likely to be at Kingston University, where we can accommodate more diverse activities for the day. These activities will involve more papers, given by a number of Murdoch scholars and Doctoral students, and there will be several workshops on the novels themselves. All members of the Iris Murdoch Society will be kept informed of developments, and the conference will be advertised well in advance on the Iris Murdoch Website.

From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch, edited by Gillian Dooley (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003; approx. 272 pages cloth, 1-57003-499-0, $35.95). This work includes twenty-three interviews by critics, academics, and journalists. The collection is introduced with an analysis of Murdoch's work, looking closely at her method of composition and development of character and situation. *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction* will be reviewed in the next edition of *The Iris Murdoch News Letter*.

Selected Poems by Frank Thompson (including a number of poems addressed to Iris Murdoch) has been published by Trent Editions. It is edited by Dorothy and Kate Thompson, with an introduction by Dorothy Thompson. This publication will be reviewed in the next issue of *The Iris Murdoch News Letter*.

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The Iris Murdoch Society

The Iris Murdoch News Letter is the publication of The Iris Murdoch Society, which was formed at the Modern Language Association Convention in New York City in December 1986. It appears annually, offering a forum for short articles, reviews and notices, and keeps members of the society informed of new publications, symposia and other news that has a bearing on the life and work of Iris Murdoch.

If you would like to join the Iris Murdoch Society and automatically receive the News Letter please write to the American or European contact.

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Treasurer's Report

The Star Financial Bank Balance as of January 31, 2002 was $1030.71. Balance as of January 31, 2003 was $717.76. The balance reflects the following transactions: additions for membership $535.00, bank interest $9.05, deductions for copying and postage $697.00, donation for Murdoch Conference $160.00.

The Iris Murdoch Society balance in the Halifax Building Society, Kingston, Surrey, UK in December 2002 was £497.66.

The Iris Murdoch Society

News Letter

Kingston University, UK and Ball State University, USA
Summer 2005, Number 18
ISSN 1528-4379

Detail from Iris Murdoch's Oxford Study

Iris Murdoch Society

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY

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Margaret Drabble: Review of *The Power of Delight: A Lifetime in Literature Essays 1962-2002*; selected by Leo Carey, John Bayley (Duckworth, 677pp, £25)

In the introduction to *The Power of Delight*, a selection of essays from 40 years of John Bayley's "lifetime in literature," the author ponders the options of the young critic. Should he lay about him ferociously in all directions or should he become the smiler with the knife? Bayley chose the latter option. His reviews radiate generosity, and he is liberal with words such as "superb," "superlative" and "masterpiece." There are few hatchet jobs (though Anthony Burgess fares badly), and occasional sideswipes at fellow practitioners such as F.R. Leavis or Christopher Ricks remain within the bounds of decorum. But on closer inspection, Bayley's praise may be dangerous, as his essay on Angela Carter illustrates. Surveying her work in 1992, the year of her death, he brims with enthusiasm for her dazzling versatility, but cannot resist pointing out, pertinently and perceptively, that "whatever spirited arabesques and feats of descriptive imagination Carter may perform she always comes to rest in the right ideological position."

Bayley has a running battle with ideology. He does not like it. His very title, taken from an article on the Polish-Jewish novelist Bruno Schulz, suggests, "The Backward Look" (the title of Bayley's essay on Ivan Bunin). On more than one occasion he queries the view of Terry Eagleton, who wrote how "Keynes once remarked that those economists who dislike theory, or claimed to get along better without it, were simply in the grip of an older theory. This is also true of students and literary critics." Bayley finds this a worrying comment (as it is). He prefers the open-endedness of D.H. Lawrence's belief that the novel is "incapable of the absolute," which he frequently uses as a touchstone.

Bayley evades the contentions of theory by rejoicing in individual writers and by stressing the importance of details and events. His brilliant essay "The Order of Battle at Trafalgar" (1986) is a moving dissertation on the relationship between historical truth, critical perceptions and critical fashions. Here he outlines the dilemma of the "common critic" in today's professional climate, and his broad range of reference brings in Lionel Trilling, Roland Barthes, Dr Johnson, Keats, Wordsworth, Arnold Bennett, Julian Barnes and, most beautifully, Zbigniew Herbert on the contemplation of pebbles. It is a pleasure to follow the movement of Bayley's discursive mind as he makes unexpected connections, finds lines of poetry to illustrate his point, and sometimes even to illustrate his adversary's point. He cannot resist quoting Richard Wilbur's lines in reply to Johnson's stone-kicking refutation of Berkeley's idealism: "Kick on, Sam Johnson, till you break your bones, But cloudy, cloudy is the stuff of stones...." They do not suit his argument very well, but they are good, and he wants us to know them, too, and we are grateful. This is open-ended, two-way discourse, which is rare.

His loyalties and likings are strongly stated, and some of them are very English. Anthony Powell's work and literary opinions pervade the volume, always invoked with a sense of familiar approval: Bayley loves the gossip, the Masonic rituals of this small but epic world. Philip Larkin is also a potent presence. Bayley's praise for Larkin's second novel, *A Girl in Winter*, as "a marvellous and sustained erotic prose poem" is eccentric, but he has a finely tuned ear for the poetry. He is good on Larkin's moments of arrest and "motions of withdrawal which are also motions of perpetuation." Larkin cheers us up, he tells us, because he reconciles us to our ills by the scrupulous way in which he notices them. He finds a similar *joie de vivre* in the graveyard gloom of A.E. Housman and W.H. Auden: "When Auden promises that 'In headaches and in worry/Slowly life leaks away,' the reader feels positively bucked up...." That is a very Bayley comment, and a characteristic example of his unconventional deployment of critical vocabulary.

The Russians are Bayley's primary passion. There are ten essays here, some written before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Soviet ideology, some after. Bayley is engagingly modest about his acquaintance with the Russian language, which he studied in order to be able to read Pushkin in the original, but it is not clear how much he has to be modest about. He certainly knows enough to be able to give us the sound of a line: the articles on Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva vividly convey a sense of the quality and music of the language, and make one wish one could have the discipline to learn enough to hear it for oneself. It must be satisfying to be able to inform the reader that a capercaillie has been mistranslated as a grouse, but it is unhelpful to be told that Pasternak looked like a horse and that his name means "parsnip." Bayley is fond of these slightly reductive and gossipy snippets of information, some of which are endearing, while others, such as this one, are strangely disquieting.

Bayley enjoys flippancy and is often very funny, though his joke about Wordsworth being "always out of fashion" like one's parents' clothes is a bit of an own goal. He has an uneasy relationship with Wordsworth and with Arnoldian high seriousness, of which he seems to disapprove. Nevertheless, he is in search of a sense of value in literature, as well as delight, and is more serious than he likes to reveal. Perhaps that in itself shows him to be not quite free of the grip of an older theory.

Margaret Drabble©
April 18, 2005

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Peter Conradi: Review of *Party in the Blitz* by Elias Canetti (Harvill, 266pp, £17.99)

Fox on the Loose

Peter Conradi finds Elias Canetti's recollections of Iris Murdoch in Party in the Blitz awash with bile, backstabbing and envy

Elias Canetti arrived in England in 1939, fleeing Hitler, with his wife and (soon) two mistresses. He was known in his adoptive Vienna for a single novel *Auto-da-Fé*, a black comedy of justified paranoia and misogyny. In England he boasted one reader only, sinologist Arthur Waley. His first three autobiographies - which helped win him the 1981 Nobel prize for literature - chronicle Viennese literary life between the wars.

Now, 11 years after his death in Zürich, here are his memoirs of the war years in England. Despite carelessnesses - *Herzog von Northumberland* stays in German; Margaret Gardiner and JD Bernal were unmarried; it was not Churchill who lost India - they are splendidly entertaining. Canetti's method is to string together small scenes, like beads, into a continuing story. Here are vignettes of London in 1940, of life among Amersham and Hampstead expatriates, of awful war-time parties. Downshire Hill was a street to delight in. His mistress Friedl's lodgings at number 35 had a private gallery of Ben Nicolsons and Hepworths; Mountbatten visited; Lee Miller and Roland Penrose, who had organised the International Surrealist Exhibition, lived diagonally opposite at number 21. And Canetti, unencumbered by any war work, was free to survey the battle of Britain from the Heath.

The English impress and move him for their war-time courage, and invite his sneers for their lack of inner life and cold arrogance. Canetti became confidant to a coterie of friends that included the poet Kathleen Raine and Gavin Maxwell, whom Raine obsessively and unreasonably loved, and Maxwell's elder brother Aymer: grandsons, he frequently reminds us, of a duke. Both were predominantly gay. A grand Maxwell relative, on being told that Canetti is a Jew, tries crassly to put him at his ease by inviting him to value a diamond. Canetti collects insults.

He also delights in human difference. In Amersham he is sheltered by innocent Mr and Mrs Milburn who go in for consulting prophetesses, and seek to reassure him during the blitz that "the bombs are imaginary." The Empsons, William and Hetta, are friends, and he admires Empson's omnicompetence, and generous party-giving, and watches how the English move at social gatherings. Canetti learns to decrypt the secret codes of conduct, a key to getting on in London, where he stayed for 40 years.

He relishes the extended intelligentsia family of Veronica Wedgwood, who translated his novel in 1946, winning him new readers. The question as to whether each new friend has read Canetti is perennially fresh and absorbing: William Empson, for example, is among those who fascinate Canetti by refusing to disclose whether or not he has read *Auto-da-Fé.*

So one motive for writing *Party in the Blitz* is for Canetti to insert himself into what he deems the world's greatest literature (English), just as his earlier memoirs effected his infiltration of the German writing scene. It should not surprise us therefore that he attacks the leading poet of the 1940s – T.S. Eliot - and one leading novelist thereafter, Iris Murdoch. Most writers, Canetti acknowledged in his earlier memoirs, displeased him due to the fact that "perhaps one would like to be the only one." His attack on Eliot's emotional impotence is more remarkable for its bile than its originality. But he tries to destroy the reputation of Murdoch, his lover then life-long friend-at-a-distance, from many directions at once, and - no gentleman - uses intimate knowledge too. Does he succeed? Only partly.

Their three-year love-affair began soon after a mutual friend, the poet Franz Steiner, died in late 1952, and resembled a battle of two hypnotists in a closed room. Murdoch acted as victim to Canetti's jealous Pasha, but both enjoyed power-play. Canetti shocked many friends for 40 years by claiming (possibly

truthfully) that love-making with Murdoch stopped Steiner's ailing heart. Here, by contrast, Canetti announces prettily that Steiner died when Murdoch proposed marriage. Truth is a commodity Canetti feels licensed to conjure with. Some friends he idealises; others he "dunks in pitch."

Each instantly started writing about the other. Murdoch portrayed Canetti in her second novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, as the cunning Mischa Fox, a mystery-man who tries to seize and destroy a Suffragette newspaper called the Artemis, Fox being no friend to independent women. She dedicated the novel to Canetti, but he resented this depiction.

Fox is presciently described as "capable of staging a careful revenge after 10 years." Canetti waited 40. Some scatter-fire misses its mark. Calling Murdoch "an unutterably petit bourgeois shop-girl" is merely snobbish: both she and Canetti were provincial adventurers, and Protestant Ireland isn't a lowlier origin than Canetti's Ruschuk on the Ottoman Danube. Murdoch said to Canetti and, he claims, others, "You're beautiful," meaning only "I'm hungry, come." Isn't this what people do say (and mean) in bed? Both were narcissists who collected admirers, leading complicated, deceitful love-lives. They resembled each other.

But some fire seems lethal. Nothing touched her deeply, he claims. He was not alone in thinking her coated in ice, or - as Stuart Hampshire put it – "utterly unwounded." Canetti brilliantly points to the mix in her of school-girl and head-mistress which indeed hurts her novels. Canetti calls her - tellingly – "ambitious as an arch-criminal." Ambitious she certainly was. What were her crimes? She wore a transparent blouse, on which he lavishes pages, to seduce Sir Aymer Maxwell, a famous pederast. Since she served up inadequately sexy lunches, wore bad underclothes and put her large feet into ugly sandals, he had thought seductiveness beyond her. Her crime was to try it out - and obsequiously - on someone else. He self-pityingly concludes: "It seemed not to have crossed her mind to wonder what it [her seductiveness] might do to me."

What precisely it did to him is revealed in Iris's journal, whose account differs from his. Soon after this meeting Iris recorded feeling both exasperated and touched by Canetti's warnings that Aymer was a "werewolf" and "would do anything he could to drive a wedge between us, even to trying to seduce me. He added, if you do do anything you regret, remember that I am merciful!"

Canetti's jealousy and paranoia illuminated many such scenes: he accused his staid mistress Marie-Louise of flirting with a postman. As Iris's cool record predicts, she survived Canetti. Not all his "creatures" did. Murdoch was, he notes incredulously, the only woman in his life who never sought to capture him. She went on to publish 24 novels, a tally he repeats, 23 more than him. And she - a woman moreover - won greater literary and social acclaim than he. He terms this - enviously – "vulgar" success.

But her least forgiveable crime I suspect was this: she was the only person who listened more than he – "greedily," he records. He secretly liked talking better than listening: she spotted and elicited his Mr Toad-like boastfulness. There can be such a thing as "listener's rape," where the person confiding comes to feel his privacy has been violated, his inner being "robbed." Canetti himself gloats over Carol Stewart's and Raine's confidences and dependency on him alike. Murdoch's ultimate crime was to listen, steal and cannibalise her friends' lives with more inwardness than Canetti.

Few read Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* twice. Fewer still read his *Crowds and Power*, with its banalities such as "The Englishman sees himself as captain on board a ship." Murdoch gave it a rare favourable review. Canetti has a cult audience and is now remembered partly because of his liaison with Murdoch. Her worldwide readership remains. His image of the scheming yet obtuse slut showing off her breasts takes its place in the complex gallery of Murdoch portraits. By contrast he spawned in her not just mysterious power-broking Mischa Fox, but also demonic puppet-master Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and rapacious woman-hating tyrant Charles Arrowby in her Booker-winning *The Sea, The Sea*. Her answer to Canetti's misogyny is exactly this showroom of monstrously egotistical men. Each novel features a Wizard of Oz who saves the fiction from high-mindedness before being exposed as pitiful. He used to boast that he had helped make her a writer. This was truer than ever he understood. Where she draws blood in her fiction, a reflection of Canetti can often be found. "I told her everything," he bitterly laments. Small wonder he came to detest her.

Peter J. Conradi
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Suzy Feay reviews references to Iris Murdoch in *A Dog's Life* by Paul Bailey (Penguin 2004); *People and Places* by Mary Warnock (Duckworth 2001) and *Going Buddhist* by Peter Conradi (London: Short Books, 2004 185pp £9.99)

Iris Murdoch Memorised

Some authors are shapeshifters, appearing subtly different each time they are described by others. Iris Murdoch, by contrast, is wonderfully consistent in appearance and manner whenever she has a walk-on role in a memoir. Whenever I meet someone who knew her, I never feel I need to ask "What was she like?" The answer is available in her work, and in the roundness and wholeness of published descriptions of her. Finding authors whose personality compares unfavourably with their work is fairly easy to do, but it would be a genuine shock were one to discover that Murdoch was spiteful or ungenerous.

That said, her brief appearances in Paul Bailey's *A Dog's Life* (Penguin, 2004) show a particularly salty Murdoch; first audibly muttering "Stupid cow" at a cretinous fan who accosted her in a reading, then addressing the same epithet to a guest at one of her parties, a "butch ex-nun" who had bored the assembled throng with her dogmatic and idiotic views about painting. Murdoch is just one of the faces glimpsed briefly in this memoir; there are also memorable sketches of Rudolph Nureyev (the state of his jockstrap!) and the appalling May Sarton. There's an entertaining description of a drunken dinner party with the unconscionably rude Sarton (it has to be said her hosts gave as much as they got). Otherwise this is a charming account of the strange people Bailey meets when walking his dog in Ravenscourt Park in Shepherd's Bush.

Mary Warnock, in *People & Places: A Memoir* (Duckworth, 2001) could be expected to have a rather specialised view of Murdoch, being a fellow Oxford philosophy don. Alas, Warnock seems to have no special insight: "I think I had only one real conversation with Iris," she admits, and saw pretty much the same figure everyone else describes: "cheerful … jolly, even. She had thick tawny hair, which looked as if she had chopped it off herself … [and a] rather stocky figure (in equine terms she was a cob, or perhaps a moorland pony." (For John Bayley, of course, she was a bull.) Their one "real conversation" concerned Eduard Fraenkel; they discovered that he had taught them both Greek. He was a brilliant scholar, but one with wandering hands. If the post-feminist consensus perhaps sees this too harshly, the pre-feminist concensus is not to take it seriously at all. Of Fraenkel's attentions to Warnock and a fellow pupil, Warnock writes: "it never struck us for a moment that there was anything we could possibly make a public fuss about; nor that Fraenkel wanted more than kisses and increasingly constant fumblings with our underclothes … we were both in the grip of a feeling that war threatened classical studies, or at least ours, and that we must get as much as we could, at whatever cost." Murdoch seems to have concurred with Warnock that their professor's sexual exploitation was a fair price to pay for his brilliance, yet it's faintly distasteful to hear Warnock conclude: "I cannot think that anything would have been improved if Iris or I or any other of Fraenkel's numerous girls had indulged in displays of self-important feminism." However, when another girl does complain, Warnock is then cast "in a very bad light" and "made to feel inexpressibly wicked" when the story comes out, a rare moment of comedy.

More palatable is Warnock's interesting analysis of the effect of Sartre's work on Murdoch's novels. One of the reasons that Warnock did not become closer to Murdoch was the profound air of sophistication she exuded, and the connection with Sartre reinforced this. Warnock remarks on the passage in Sartre's *La Nausée* where the protagonist, Roquentin, ponders the horrifying complexity of existence when looking at tree-roots. "[Existence] was absurd. What made him see this was black twisted impenetrable convolutions of the roots of the tree." Despite Murdoch's protestations that she hated to put philosophical ideas in her novels, Warnock argues persuasively that something like this underlines Murdoch's "deep awareness of, almost obsession with, the recalcitrant 'thinginess' of things," exemplified by, for example, the dreadful, inexorable sinking of the Riley into the river in *The Sandcastle*; and, of course, the bell. Warnock and Murdoch's other meetings were sociable and in company, and they never spoke intimately again. There's a nice sketch of Murdoch and John Bayley, as guests of honour, dominating a supper party with a fervent discussion of recent developments in The Archers, rather than interacting with the American guests who so longed to meet them.

Though Murdoch seems to have presented the same face to everyone she met, people's reactions to her differed. Peter Conradi seems to have been less offended by Murdoch's (self-protective?) questioning of others than was A.N. Wilson. In *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her (*Arrow, 2003*)*, he describes the habit rather resentfully. But to that questioning, Conradi owes his life – at least his spiritual life – and he is overwhelmingly grateful.

Going Buddhist (Short Books, 2004) is Conradi's delightfully crisp coda to his mammoth biography of Murdoch. She is in the very first sentence: "Iris Murdoch asks, alarmingly, 'Are you a religious person?' Autumn 1982, misty; evening dark early and cold. Our first solo talk; her first question." Conradi cannot for the moment reply, but recent panic attacks are making the question "how to live?" an urgent one. In an article for the *Evening Standard*, Conradi was more specific about her influence than he is in the book: "Help, for me, came unexpectedly. A friend, the novelist Dame Iris Murdoch, talked to me about religion. She thought that Buddhism had much to teach the West … Initially sceptical if not downright hostile, I soon opted to explore meditation myself." Soon Conradi was passing everything he learnt about Buddhism on to Murdoch, who then, paradoxically, began to advocate Christianity and Judaism back to him.

It's clear that their many happy differences of opinion influenced the later novels, specifically *The Sea, The Sea*. I was fascinated to learn of her admiration of the books of John Blofeld (though Conradi spells it Blofield), a poetic, passionate translator of Chinese Buddhist thought to the West. Blofeld's delightful openness of mind about paranormal activity surely found a place in that majestic novel.

To some extent, she was Conradi's guru: exacting, loving, full of insight: "The mixed sense of space and of claustrophobia recorded by students in the presence of certain Tibetan Buddhist teachers was, when I met them later, already familiar to me from being with her." And she gets the last – as she gets the first – word, saying "gently and firmly: 'That's good.'"

Suzy Feay
The *Independent*
2004

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Laurie Lindberg: Review of *The Myths We Live By* by Mary Midgley (London; New York: Routledge, 2003 175 pp)

Mary Midgley's most recent book, *The Myths We Live By*, provides further evidence of her widely acknowledged excellence as a moral philosopher and writer. Like Iris Murdoch, her colleague and friend, Midgley insists that human beings not only can but must make moral judgments, and in this book she identifies several pervasive modern ideas which she does not hesitate to judge as wrong-minded, to say the least. Although her tone is generally mild, she argues that many of the beliefs put forth as truths about the human condition and human consciousness by modern thinkers may be downright dangerous to us all.

Composed of previously published essays which Midgley has revised and shaped into a coherent argument, her book is highly readable and persuasive to the amateur philosopher and the general reader, as well as those knowledgeable about moral philosophers through history. She analyzes the myths that she finds alarming and identifies their proponents; she explains the origin of these myths within their philosophical context, and then argues most convincingly her objections to the myths as they are understood today.

The author establishes at the start her definition of "myth:" "Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning"(1). The first myths which she discusses are "the social contract," "progress," and "omnicompetent science," all of which originated around the time of the Enlightenment. The most dangerous aspect of these myths is not the ideas themselves, but the way in which they were developed by philosophers and scientists. Although Midgley finds elements of truth at the heart of each myth, the original concepts were distorted or misapplied by Enlightenment thinkers convinced that science and technology could solve all the problems of humanity. Descartes proposed the mind/body split and helped to popularize the idea that reason was all-powerful. He and other thinkers, such as Rousseau, glorified the ideals of freedom and individuality. Few among us in the Western world would deny that human beings should be free to develop their unique talents and interests, to assert their interests and follow their ambitions. But what happens, Midgley asks, when freedom conflicts with other valued ideals, such as compassion and justice? When individuality degenerates into "mindless competitiveness," the dismal and often alarming results of which we see around us every day?

Midgley explains herself in terms accessible to the layperson, offering facts that will be enlightening to many readers. For example, some people believe that Darwin coined the term "survival of the fittest," when it was Herbert Spencer who created the phrase and then used the term "evolution" for his own purposes. Spencer appropriated a principle that Darwin had discovered (and applied only to biological species) and applied it to society in general and to business in particular, giving us Social Darwinism. Thus we have the current thinking of many people on the superiority of "free trade" in business, and, in social

terms, the inadvisability of charity for the hungry and homeless. If the poor can't survive without aid, the reasoning goes, they don't deserve to survive. Midgley offers us a statement of his own theory from Spencer himself, who remarked regarding the "unfit" or poor that "the whole effort of nature is to get rid of such, to clear the world of them, and to make room for better … and it is best that they should die" (80).

Midgley deplores Spencer's reductive line of thought, and its descendant, Richard Dawkins' recent theory of "the selfish gene." In painstaking detail, Midgley considers the points that Dawkins makes about human motivation, which he claims is pure selfishness. Presumably our genes calculate our best interests and cause us to act in ways that will advance those interests. This is true science, Dawkins says, and the truth about humanity. Altruism is impossible, and not even desirable. Emotions are only an illusion; reason (that is, self-interest) rules our lives. Midgley counters the claims of Dawkins and those who are like-minded by insisting that emotion and reason can never truly be separated, that to be human is to employ reason tempered by emotion, and emotion moderated by reason. She emphasizes the complexity of human thoughts and motives, and the limitations of any system of thought which personifies biological genes as evolutionary devices that control our actions. Human beings make choices based on ethical and moral beliefs, not genes: "We are not machines designed for a single purpose, we are many-sided creatures with a full life to live" (156).

In one particularly interesting chapter, "Is Reason Sex-Linked?" Midgley questions society's devotion to the supposedly universal value of individualism. Do we advocate individual freedom for all, or only for some? The first philosopher to ask the question, according to Midgley, was Mary Wollstonecraft, who dared to suggest that Rousseau's popular ideal of the individual as "free, autonomous, and creative" should be applied to women as well as men. A "general fury" was the result, and Wollstonecraft was termed "a hyena in petticoats" by one of her contemporaries (92). Feminist proposals for the education and enfranchisement of women produced virtually the same indignation throughout the nineteenth century. Although we might assume that a right sacred to Western traditions should be granted to *all* of its members, Midgley concludes that despite some recent gains, as a culture we are still far from granting the same freedoms to women as we do to men.

Just as she points out that women are not always included when it comes to "human rights," Midgley comments on the ambivalence of society in its approach to non-human animals. To what extent should we extend to animals the rights we accord to human beings? If we consider non-human animals in the context of "the machine model," we can deny them consciousness and emotion, and then subject them to whatever painful procedures we desire. Jane Goodall and others have done much to prove that primates, at least, share a number of psychological and emotional characteristics with human beings. Midgley sums up the dilemma in this way: "If they are sufficiently like us to be really comparable, they may be too like us to be used freely as experimental subjects" (147). Many people are uncomfortable, too, with the idea of experimenting on animals considered domestic companions. The case is different when it comes to animals which we've been conditioned to view as merely convenient objects for laboratory tests, such as the rat. The principle, however, is the same, according to Midgley: "Humane values are central to our official morality. In general, we do not think it is a quite trivial matter whether we are inflicting suffering" (151). Although experimentation on animals is often justified on the grounds of its benefit to humans and its contribution to knowledge in general, Midgley points out that "if either the use or the knowledge is trivial, the justification vanishes" (151). Midgley looks hopefully to the contemporary concept of the ecosystem, in which interdependent forms of life may each find a place. Within such a system, no creatures are sacrificed for the use of others.

The Myths We Live By is a book which reminds a reader just how accessible and even entertaining philosophy can be, without simplifying complex issues. Few, if any, parents would now pay attention to B.F. Skinner's once influential theories about child-rearing, which mandated that children be treated with objectivity and kept at a distance, with displays of affection forbidden. But we live in an age of amazing technological advances and bewildering scientific discoveries, an age when the human mind is compared to a computer and the human body to a machine. How can we know if our actions are controlled by selfish genes? How do we discover the truth about our lives, our society? Midgley's book itself constitutes an excellent model for investigating and judging, rather than summarily accepting, ideas which strike us as arbitrary or simplistic.

In *The Myths We Live By*, Midgley strongly advocates the use of reason *and* feeling as we make the most balanced, enlightened judgments we can about cultural myths, ourselves, and our place in the world.

Laurie Lindberg , Ball State University, 2005

Frances White champions the blurring of fact and fiction in John Bayley's three volumes of memoirs of Iris Murdoch, and defends the Bayleys from A.N. Wilson's heartless attack in his own memoir of Murdoch. She goes on to explore how John Bayley's fiction casts a fascinating light on the memoirs, and suggests that they merit a place alongside Murdoch's own work.

'The Good, the Nice, and the Ugly'

Iris, the first volume of John Bayley's trilogy of 'memoirs' was read mainly by two audiences: those interested in Iris Murdoch, whether as novelist or philosopher, and by researchers in or fellow-sufferers from Alzheimer's disease which so radically affects not only the subject/patient but also those who care for them. *Iris* was acclaimed by the latter group as an illuminatingly honest account, of help and inspiration to many. The former group was more divided in response: those bereft of her flow of novels and philosophical works were glad to read more about Iris Murdoch, but others felt that John Bayley had exploited his wife's sad condition and abused her right to privacy. Did *anyone* read it because they were interested in John Bayley? His presence in his own writing was taken as secondary to that of his more famous wife, yet he, as much as she, and the marriage between them, is the subject of the book. The second volume, *Iris and the Friends*, made this tripartite subject more evident, Bayley's pre-Iris memories assuming a far larger space than before, and the third, *Widower's House*, whilst still firmly concerned with Iris, her death and their life together, is almost entirely about John Bayley himself. Her tragic illness and death have caused her life to become a matter of public knowledge, which was perhaps inevitable. What was not inevitable is that it should have illuminated and publicised the 'Life and Times' of her husband who was previously well-known only amongst academics, specialists in the 'Eng. Lit. business' (*Iris*, 52), and a certain social circle in Oxford. His name is now familiar to many who have never read one of his wife's novels let alone any of John Bayley's own previous writing, and within his own lifetime he has been portrayed on film by Hugh Bonneville and Jim Broadbent, a relatively unusual experience, certainly for a retired and apparently retiring Oxford Don.

The three books that make up John Bayley's memoirs need to be considered from a dual perspective: from the point of view of the interest they generate in the author himself, and from interest in the response they have evoked, particularly from an old pupil and fellow-writer, A.N.Wilson whose 'riposte,' *Iris Murdoch as I Knew Her* (with the emphasis firmly on the personal pronoun) followed hot on the heels of Bayley's trilogy in 2003. In considering these texts, issues of truth and lies, fact and fiction, and the whole question of the nature of memoir/biography writing emerges, upon which light can be shed, as upon so much else in life, by the writings of Iris Murdoch herself.

I

The Trilogy: *Iris* (1998), *Iris and the Friends* (1999) and *Widower's House* (2001).

There is a sophisticated structure beneath the apparent artlessness of *Iris*. The gently confiding 'talking voice' appears to meander, but a process of selection and patterned repetition controls and shapes the narrative. Rivers and swimming, the appearance of a kingfisher, and the lady on the bicycle weave in and out of the text. Past and present interlink. The reason for writing the book, Iris Murdoch's contraction of Alzheimer's, doesn't arise until over eighty percent of the way through, and then just as "a slight qualm" (146), yet it is omnipresent from the start. The story is studded with commentary on Iris Murdoch's novels, their value and the methods of their creation, art criticism, astute perceptions, sensitive observations, the overspill of Bayley's lifetime of omnivorously catholic reading,[1] and gems of arcane knowledge. Bayley explores the dynamic of their marriage, the progressive stages of Iris's illness, and his own emotional life in response to it, in a plaited strand of thoughts and memories which smoothly link one thought to another in "a droll freedom of association" (*Iris and the Friends*, 11). Bayley's honesty is transparent, and his self-knowledge insightful; he knows he is selecting and he knows one can do no other.

[1] "His erudition glows gently in a way that informs and engages the reader." Vincent Hanlon, "Taking the Short View." In *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, April 18, 2000: 162 (8).

The owl functions in the second volume, *Iris and the Friends*, as the kingfisher does in the first; the rivers continue to flow through the narrative, and Belial, Milton's intellectual demon who becomes John Bayley's 'familiar,' forms another linking device. The structure of the second volume is just as carefully controlled, though differently – in *Iris* nothing 'happens;' in this book Iris dies, which makes for a sense of climax. But again this narrative is a complex and sophisticated interweaving, gaining in pace and impact towards the end of the second part, with the final section forming a 'Coda' after Iris's death. She has been dead from the beginning of the book – the opening words announce (with disbelief) that "it's all over" (9), but Iris is present throughout, asleep beside the narrator as Bayley's careful use of the present tense keeps returning to the 'now' of the past. With him, readers are centred in the bed, in the marriage; with his mind, our minds wander, Belial-fashion, over other times, other places, in and out of memory and fantasy, which is not always easily distinguishable for him or for us. "That childhood idyll" (65) is stressed but subverted by the evident lack of parental affection and his own isolation. Similarly, we traverse his war memories and earlier loves, Hannelore and Mary – he dreams of fair but unhappy women. The image of the vest-catching-on-the chair links back to an 'underwear motif' in *Iris* (the faded waist-slip "stiff with powdery traces of dry mud" (11) which Bayley has kept since their first swim together, and the old vest "marbled … in a delicate patterning of pink and Tuscan red" (81) from a wine-spill on their honeymoon). The image is his overtly Proustian aide-memoire, and another patterning device – indeed it forms his poignant closure, as he is unable now to share his inner life with his beloved wife. (He shares it instead with us.) As in the first volume, a wealth of critical knowledge of English Literature illuminates and parallels his musings. There are pointers towards his own fiction as well as Iris Murdoch's and a significant critique of her as a novelist is scattered casually through the pages. Bayley's affection for his wife is not in question; it permeates everything he writes, and is not diminished by the brutally honest acknowledgement of the desperation, in himself as well as in Iris, to escape this intolerable situation. The build up of pace and pressure through the final pages (Janet Stone's funeral, the car journey with Iris's leap from the car, her refusal to eat, his nightmare, his breakdown of 'Mut,' his crying and walking alone around the block before their "rescue" and her death) is masterly, and the reader experiences it with him – it cannot be read without tears.

Bayley is aware both of what he is doing in his writing and of its inescapable falsification. This book is a meditation on memory and fantasy and their uses. He describes what it is *like* to fantasise better than any other writer – better even than Iris Murdoch herself. His fiction is not in the same league, as he knows himself, because it is rooted more in fantasy than in imagination, but his truthfulness and accuracy in describing the in/out of fantasy/ reality within the mind, and its necessity for mental health as a controlled consoling psychodrama, is unequalled.

Widower's House marks a distinct change of tone from the previous books. It is sharp and waspish, querulous, even petulant at times. However hard it was to live with Iris's Alzheimer's, while she was still with him, Bayley maintained a serenity of centredness; without her the centre cannot hold and disintegration threatens. The jagged narrative of his first year of widowerhood mirrors this state. Fantasy no longer offers a healthy escape from unbearable reality; it comes, as he says himself, almost to engulf it. But this account is also clever, patterned and controlled – more so than its initial reviewers (patently mesmerised by the vision of an elderly Don vamped by Margot and Mella) were able to perceive. Two elements are held in tense conjunction by a mind uncommonly able to observe itself with detachment, even as it grievously suffers: the tragedy of loss and appalling grief, and the comedy and absurdity of the human condition. This unusual linking of a serious study in bereavement with a comedy of misunderstanding (of self as much as of others) has lead to puzzled bemusement. One does not expect a tale of heartbreak to be juxtaposed and intertwined with elements of bedroom farce. Yet, as no one has shown more clearly than Iris Murdoch in her novels, the terrible and the comic co-exist; both are integral to human experience. We are too absurd for the dignity of pure tragedy; too important simply to be laughed at.

Both the terrible and the comic are present in the mimesis of grief offered by *Widower's House* with its repetitions and its need to tell of Iris's last days over and over, a common symptom of bereavement that gives this third volume continuity with the second. It exhibits, as well as describes, Bayley's emotional disintegration and his self-dislike in this unaccustomed persona of widower, which brings mixed feelings, confused desires and loss of sharp recall of the beloved, all also strong features of bereavement and never better caught in words. The 'Widower's House' is a consciously literary image, despite his disclaimer of familiarity with Bernard Shaw's play of similar title. (The other acknowledged literary precursor is Laurence Sterne's Uncle Toby – surely a clear indication that Bayley is aware of humour in his own sorrowful position.) The house functions as a device to explore the trap of grief and the need for escape from it, which requires a fictional physical running-away scene, and in turn requires something/someone to run *from* – a

correlative of the invisible presence of grief itself. Hence the legendary monster, the Gryphon, in the bathetic guise of waif-like Mella.

Even before Bayley's admission that Margot and Mella are composite ideas that embody the pressures of this trauma, it is evident that these characters are imaginary – his portrayal of them is close to that of the characters in his novels, and nothing like his accounts of real people he has known (Lord David Cecil for example). The difficulty lies in a slippage of genres – the memoir genre is erroneously presumed to be concerned with matters of fact. "Memoirs, which I see as partly fiction" said Professor Anthony Edmonds during a seminar at the second Iris Murdoch Conference: *rem acu tetigisti*. Just as Bayley the critic is clearly in evidence throughout this trilogy, so Bayley the novelist manifests himself strongly in this last book, but in its lack of any clear indication of this presence, it is not surprising that many readers have evinced reproachful disbelief.

It is fruitless to make any definitive attempt to disentangle fact from fiction in *Widower's House*. It needs to be read and understood in a different way. That said, the derision which has been levelled at the notion of septuagenarian sexuality seems to deserve some rebuttal. Sex is not a matter of youth and beauty as many characters in Murdoch's novels exemplify – the relationship between Tamar and Duncan in *The Book and the Brotherhood* is one of myriad possible examples. It can be offered as a form of comfort or consolation, or employed as a means of claiming a person as one's own, a proprietary act. Widows are commonly known to be offered inappropriate physical sympathy or 'taken advantage of' in their grief – why *not* widowers likewise? I do not find John Bayley's account of his experiences as psychologically implausible as many reviewers suggest it to be.

Most interesting in *Widower's House* are the shifts in consciousness which occur when the suffering of 'caring' and seeing Iris grow progressively more ill, is superseded by the suffering of losing her and being alone. The consolation of fantasy, so predominant in *Iris and the Friends*, grows flat and stale, and gives way to consolation derived from words (119). Memory, so long a source of pleasure and comfort, is now "like a cancer" (185). The ingenious devices of the mind developed as mechanisms for coping with one form of mental strain are not transferable to another. Fantasy and memory may be 'friends' of an Alzheimer's carer or 'Poujin' – so much nicer a word (177), but they are no friends to grief or to "the gap caring leaves when it stops" (*Iris and the Friends*, 206). New coping mechanisms have to be discovered or created, and this third volume gives hope for the possibility that they can be. Bayley's honesty, by means of both memoir and fantasy, offers light and comfort in the darkness of the bereaved as well as in the darkness of living with Alzheimer's.

II

A.N.Wilson's *Iris Murdoch as I Knew Her (2003)*
and his Introduction to John Bayley's *In Another Country* (1986).

In common with many admirers of Iris Murdoch's and John Bayley's books, I read A.N. Wilson's 'contribution' to the growing biographical literature about Murdoch "possessed by a sensation like rage" (*Iris Murdoch as I Knew Her*, 9). It is a gratuitously iconoclastic book, most charitably interpreted as mischievously so, but as fresh insult is added to original injury, charity runs short. Ungrateful, impertinent – one's stock of pejorative adjectives is stretched to depletion by this sour screech of pettiness and pique. To borrow Wilson's own words again, his book is "dirty on a scale which it would require a new vocabulary to describe" (245). After a puzzling opening about his own lack of 'hang-ups' (the rare people who don't have such things don't know that they don't), Wilson parades a wide variety of neuroses and complexes before the reader. Space precludes a prolonged discussion of the book, which is in any case too slight to deserve overmuch scrutiny. Suffice it to say that the spite of the biographer manqué, and the semi-consciously Oedipal nature of his relationship to his subjects (for the title misleadingly omits *and John Bayley as I Knew Him*) have been noted by many reviewers. His "spectacularly rude,"[2] petty bourgeois obsession with personal and domestic hygiene calls to mind Alexander Pope at his most apoplectic – but it lacks his wit. Most striking of all is Wilson's deluded belief that he is the intellectual equal of these exceptional writers, despite his own acknowledgement that he "was never going to get a good enough degree to become a proper don" (203). The inflated expectations of Wilson's schoolmasters were perhaps compounded by the encouragement of John Bayley as his tutor. (Rarely can a hand have been quite so savagely bitten by one that

[2] Matt Seaton, "I'm Mr Evil." In *The Guardian Review*, 3 September, 2003.

it has fed.) Two strictures stand out as breath-takingly inappropriate. The first is Wilson's blame of Honor Tracy for his loss of 'innocent vision' of 'the Bayleys.' Incredibly, he comments that "one might have thought that Honor could have repaid [Iris Murdoch's kindness] by always having kind words for her old friend. Not a bit of it. She saw IM and JOB as ridiculous figures" (121). The second concerns John Bayley's memoirs in which, says Wilson, "we feel the narrator to be revealing much more of himself and his own mixture of motives and emotions than he can have appreciated when he sent the manuscript to the publisher" (258). The lack of self-awareness that could produce such accusations without noticing their reflexive application beggars belief.

A possible interpretation of this *strange* diatribe, lies in the Oedipal hang-ups that Wilson is at such pains to deny, combined with the trusting naivety of the 'victims.' Bayley "has been a dear friend and mentor and supporter of mine" (27) he tells us at the start, and later, that Iris Murdoch "was an important person in my life before I met her" (202). She was his role model (40) and inspired him to become a novelist; further, he saw her as "a Wise Woman, a person quite out of the ordinary" (262-3). He openly admits that he "did not really want to know" the information needed to write her biography, and that this was because he wanted "my friendship with IM and JOB, which has been such a bright light in my life, to go on as before" (63). It would appear that knowing too much about his heroine would make it problematic for the friendship to continue. Why should that be?

For a further clue to this puzzle, it is necessary to look at the glowing (almost fulsome) introduction that Wilson wrote for the reissue in 1986 of Bayley's first novel, *In Another Country*, originally published in 1955. In it Wilson tells of Elizabeth Bowen's urging him to read the book, and admits; "my failure to read it was deliberate," because he (unnecessarily) feared it might prove not to be good, and "I admired John Bayley's critical books…this side idolatry, and *I did not want the idol tarnished*" (*In Another Country*, vi, my italics). He is "one of their toy-children" (*Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her*, 14); they were his "toy-parents" (12) and despite his denial that such figures can "have the dire influence that … the real ones impart to us"(12), he subsequently appears to blame them for everything from his first ill-fated marriage (204) to his sloppy scholarship (43). He had unwisely, and probably unwittingly, placed them on a pedestal, then when they proved to be human, grew angry at their feet of clay, and had to smash his own idolatrous images. It is a pity that he felt compelled to do so in public. The corresponding mistake of John and Iris was not to recognise Wilson's Peter Pan-like inability (refusal?) to grow up (it may even have been part of his attraction for them). They gave him therefore something too fragile and precious to 'play with,' the privilege of being party to their intimate private lives, not realising that he was bound to break it.

On re-reading *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her* I uncovered helpful insights into Murdoch's work and pertinent critical comments on it, which I'd missed among the "ordure…spicily mixed with bile"[3] the first time round. Finally, "something like rage" gives way to recognition that any such emotional expenditure is wasted, and that one should perhaps regard this sad, wounding and wounded book with more pity than blame.

III

John Bayley's novels: *In Another Country* (1955), *Alice* (1994),
The Queer Captain (1995), *George's Lair* (1996) and *The Red Hat* (1997).

The fame of John Bayley's *Iris* Trilogy has not spread to his fiction which remains relatively unknown. This is not the place for the thorough critical survey his novels merit, but only for a brief look at the light they cast on his memoir-writing. When Bayley first met Murdoch they were both writing their first (published) novels. *Under the Net* achieved instant acclaim in 1954 and set Iris Murdoch's long career as a novelist in motion: *In Another Country* received little recognition in 1955 and John Bayley left fictional writing to his wife for the next four decades, devoting his own energies to teaching and criticism. Whether her success discouraged him from continuing as a novelist is a moot point, but as her creative activity ceased, (*Jackson's Dilemma* appeared in 1995), his own creativity increased with a sudden florescence of four novels in four successive years before he moved into the writing of memoirs. More time must have become available to him with retirement from teaching in 1992, though his critical and journalistic output has continued at a prodigious rate. More significantly perhaps, caring for Iris Murdoch as her illness progressed caused him to be "held in suspended animation," a condition fruitful to the fantasising which he describes in his memoirs, and which he

[3] Peter Conrad, "Tittle-Tattle Trader." In *The Observer*, Sunday 31 August, 2003.

harnessed as material for these late novels. Their genesis is described in *Iris* when he pointed out an unusual-looking person to his wife and wondered if she would "alchemise …into one of her plots" (140). The baton was passed back: "Why don't *you* write a story about her" (*140*). Thus began *Alice*.

In Another Country is a conventional novel, telling a straightforward story loosely based on Bayley's army experiences and first romance: Hannelore becomes Liese Linkmann. Wilson's assessment of the novel in 1986 as "effortlessly stylish" and "politically astute," and his praise for its celebration of ordinariness, proved a vain attempt to galvanize new interest in a neglected work which had been praised by Elizabeth Bowen. Returning to fiction forty years on, Bayley eschewed conventional realism for post-modern melodrama in a curious and idiosyncratic mêlée where James Bond meets Barbara Pym and the drama of drug and arms dealers and the humble task of washing-up are deliciously juxtaposed. *Alice* and the two following novels, *The Queer Captain* and *George's Lair*, form a trilogy with the linking figures of Ginnie Thornton and the Grey brothers, Alexander, Bobby and Peter, appearing in all three (the brothers irresistibly bring to mind both the three Bayley brothers and the brothers Karamazov). *George's Lair* closes where *Alice* opens, with Ginnie alone, and the trilogy could perhaps be seen as a belated *Bildungsroman* with her as the central character. *The Red Hat* stands alone as an ultra-modern self-reflexive novel in which the Barbara Pym quotidian element has vanished; there are possible terrorists but no-one washes up. None of these novels have received serious critical attention, although the last, when published in America as Bayley's fictional 'début' attracted some notice, most of it unfavourable because readers who were familiar with the *Iris* trilogy were hoping for more of the same, and were disconcerted by the difference between Bayley the novelist and Bayley the memoirist.

What light, then, do the novels shed on the memoirs? Three strands can usefully be picked out: the high degree of self-awareness that Bayley brings to both forms of writing, his sense of himself, and an alternative glimpse of his life with Iris Murdoch. All the novels of the '90s are overtly concerned with the nature of story-telling. In *Alice* Bayley deliberately sets up the genres of the "old-fashioned novel" (*Alice, 12)* and "a story in a woman's magazine" (16) and then subverts them. He pits fantasy against truth, consciously exploring the links between them: "How strange were people's motives and desires! But stranger still the stories that they told themselves, and then tried, perhaps unconsciously, to find a real-life equivalent" (*Alice*, 111). Following on from this thought of Ginnie's, Peter Grey in *The Queer Captain* makes Caroline Hatchcombe his 'real-life' imprisoned maiden in a tower, before becoming bored with the game he is playing with 'real' 'toys' (much play is made with the nature of virtual reality in this second novel). And in *The Red Hat* Nancy's story and the truth of what happens to her are inextricable, becoming what Roland calls ambiguously "the true story of her own story" (*The Red Hat*, 147). Fact versus fiction, 'truth' (or the nearest approximation we can get to it) versus lies, and the grey area which separates and unites these apparent opposites are the underlying themes of all these novels. As Ginnie's inadvertent *bon mot* points up "lying is [Alice's] own form of sincerity" (*Alice*, 126). Perhaps it is John Bayley's, too. Writing fiction – story-telling – telling stories – lying: whereabouts on this continuum does any particular piece of writing fall? Yet it is arguably from fiction that we learn the greatest truths about human nature and human experience – the paradox seems built into the very heart of creative writing.

Bayley's persona in the *Iris* Trilogy is a specifically chosen and created one, so skilfully executed that the reader is tempted to take it for the 'real thing' – this *is* John Bayley speaking. As Protean as his wife (*Iris*, 40-41) and his own fictional characters (*The Red Hat*, 144), Bayley assumes different shapes in each of his forms of writing. (As critic he takes on yet further shapes beyond the scope of this essay.) A sharp sense of self-awareness in the form of sly self-parody (one is reminded of the Iris Murdoch who created Arnold Baffin in *The Black Prince* and the ending of *The Philosopher's Pupil*) is displayed in *The Queer Captain*, in which Bayley splits himself between his characters. He can be seen in Dr 'Johnny' Bowser, the Oxford Don who knows the popularity of "this academic gossip stuff" (*The Queer Captain*, 77) and who writes "charming but openly sentimental reminiscences of his childhood" (*77*). Bowser thinks he must "choose … between being famous but absurd, or respected but disregarded" (80) and is "positively post-modern" (103). Bayley is also present in the innocent Barbara Pym heroine, Ginnie, with her incorrigible fantasies which do no-one any harm (113), and who was "naturally truthful herself…yet made no distinction in her own mind between the true and the false. They were separate worlds, and each could be, and was, equally authentic …. [S]he knew that what she read, or made up, was as true as what happened to her. She believed in all three" (112). (A passage that needs bearing in mind whilst reading *Widower's House*?) Other Bayley characteristics are evinced by the 'Captain' himself, who sees at last "with appalling clarity, how fatally he had mixed up truth with his own fantasy, instead of keeping them safely apart" (160), who is "always acting" (124) and "liked to daydream while he was cooking"(125). Finally, the remark made about

Mr Misconti, that "he was well aware that listeners would be more, and not less, impressed if he presented his own considerable activities … with a touch of ridicule" (174) could equally apply to the Bayley who, as critics have noted,[4] plays down 'his own considerable' achievements as soldier and scholar in his narration of the *Iris* books. Similarly, in *The Red Hat*, Roland shares attributes with his creator: "Teachers of English are all the same," he says, "we instinctively translate the little we know of life into the much more that we know of literature" (*The Red Hat*, 175). Roland later describes himself as "always timid and cautious, a typical English academic," possibly even, "naff" (178). This is not Bayley's self-assessment, this is Bayley's amused acknowledgement that this is how others may perceive him – he knows himself to be very much more and very much other than this – mysteriously irreducible. He proves as elusive as Iris Murdoch herself.

Nancy Deverell in *The Red Hat* is a story-teller. She narrates the first section of the novel, and is then pursued by Roland who is as much in love with her story as with Nancy. Elements of their relationship echo Bayley's memoirs of his marriage with Murdoch: "We chattered away … together like a pair of magpies…. It was the happiest sensation. I knew we should soon start talking again, communing together…. She would be laughing, chuckling into my face, breaking off to be companionably abstracted for a moment" (*The Red Hat*, 143-4). Roland loves Nancy's story-telling ability, and later worries about her apparent loss of it. "I wondered what on earth was going on now in that head of hers, which had created so many inventions" he says (164), and more poignantly: "I was touched by the vacant melancholy of her appearance…. She looked like someone who is killing time while waiting to go. Did I mean that she was no longer bothering – for that was the impression she made – to invent her stories, and so to live them?" (156). Such words could well describe the Murdoch of the memoirs, yet even out of context it is plain that these sentences do not come from the *Iris* books, the *tone* is wrong – this is the voice of a *different narrator*. However, there may be ways in which Nancy is Iris and Iris is Nancy, and this last novel offers the informed reader much insight into what it was like inside John Bayley's head as he watched the bright vivacious spinner of stories with whom he had lived for so long, and in whose inventive gifts and habits he took such delight, becoming extinguished as the Alzheimer's inexorably claimed more and more of her once exceptional mind.

This fictional insight illuminates a problematic aspect of Bayley's deliberately self-deprecating "faux naïf pose"[5] in his memoirs, even as it suggests that as much 'truth' may be found in his fiction as 'fabulation' may be found in his non-fiction. Wilson's evident anger with Bayley's *Iris* Trilogy, aside from his personal agenda, would seem to derive from the limitations of his reading of it as supposed 'truth.' One can sympathize with his frustration that the complex, subtle, extraordinarily clever man he knew so well and revered so highly, should have presented himself to the public in a single and simplified guise as a bumbling, rather passive 'fuddy-duddy' husband to a very much more talented and remarkable wife. However, reading Bayley's novels alongside the memoirs may act as a helpful corrective. Here we see this ferociously clever mind at *play*, and the narratorial role is not the whimsical one selected for the memoirs (wisely, as it contributes to their wide-spread appeal),[6] but a more active, ludic, self-reflexive, highly literary one, no more the 'real' voice of John Bayley than is the voice of the *Iris* Trilogy, but another of this writer's many voices.

IV

Memoirs and the Problem of Genre: John Bayley and the Problem of Reputation.

Reading John Bayley's writing as a whole, then, problematizes any easy categorisation of his work. Straightforward novels present no difficulty, but books like *Widower's House* wherein the truth of what happened and the 'truth' of his story are closely interwoven without guidelines as to where fact leaves off and fantasy begins (a distinction Bayley may scarcely be capable of) make simple classification impossible. John Sturrock's evocative term for Louis Althusser's *L'Avenir dure Longtemps*, a 'traumabiography,' seems perhaps the most apt for this confused and confusing book. There is a further complication in what is already an area of uncertainty – that of what to call narratives concerning the description of illness and death by an observer, which is a growing genre that has met with opprobrium as well as popularity. These texts have

[4] Joan Bridgman, "Learning from Alzheimer's." In *Contemporary Review*, January 2000.
[5] Joan Bridgman, "Learning from Alzheimer's."
[6] "Reading his work is as comfortable as slipping on an old slipper." Joan Bridgman, "John Bayley's Final Volume," in *Contemporary Review*, November, 2001.

been termed "emotional pornography"[7] by those most unhappy with them: a less emotive descriptive term is pathography, which as John Wiltshire observes, "appears in different forms, nestled into a book about something else"[8]. In the case of the *Iris* Trilogy pathogrophy seems to be 'nestling' in Bayley's own autobiographical musings – though whether he would thus have mused without his wife's illness and the specifically paradoxical mixture of crisis and passivity induced by it will remain unknown. 'Pathography' delineates some observable features of Bayley's writing. Its "raw material … is illness, usually devastating or mortal illness, and its task is to make sense of this"[9]. Further, pathography is "a means by which … care-giving is endured,"[10] it "takes up the disturbing and meaning-denying aspects of illness experience and attempts to make them into something that can be thought."[11] No wonder then that Wiltshire considers that Bayley's books "beautifully illustrate some aspects of pathography's function."[12] Bayley had no such awareness or intention when he began to write the first of these books, however. His "wish was to cheer myself up by remembering things we had done together in nearly forty-five years of marriage,"[13] and "it had not occurred to [him] that in the act of writing about Iris [he] might be creating a new person, a third person, the kind of biographical portrait which has become the biographer's own work of art."[14]Yet being a writer of experience and skill, a natural shaper of narrative and deployer of words to specific effect, this was bound to be the outcome. And not only did he create his own 'Iris,' he also created a 'fourth person,' a new John Bayley, called up to fulfil the needs of this particular literary task.

A biography of Iris Murdoch; an autobiography of John Bayley; the inescapable fictions that an attempt at either is predestined to turn into; memoir; pure fiction; 'impure fiction;' traumabiography; pathography; any or all of these terms could be, and have been, applied to the Iris Trilogy, and I'm not sure what purpose hardline categorisation serves. What is more important is the value and reputation of the books themselves. John Bayley's image has reached the National Portrait gallery only in a photograph of him with Iris Murdoch, not as a figure of national pride in his own right. This omission is indicative of his position in the general view of their partnership, and – with regard not only to the relative fame of each but also to the value variously and unequally accorded by society to the roles of novelists and critics – not unreasonable. Even more troubling is his inclusion as a contributor to a book called *Living With A Writer* edited by Dale Salwark, in which the families of well-known writers were asked to share the impact made on them by the writer's mode of existence. Such relegation of John Bayley to one who lives *with* a writer seems to me to ignore the essential fact that he too, every bit as much as Iris Murdoch, albeit less famously, *is* a writer. He, no less than she, is a 'word child,' and the motto for both could be '*Scribo, ergo sum.*' John Bayley's work should be taken seriously and accorded its proper worth (to which the publication of *The Power of Delight* should add weight), and this most remarkable of twentieth century literary partnerships should be clearly seen as a marriage of equals, each enabling the other to achieve their artistic and intellectual potential. Without Iris Murdoch we would not have John Bayley's remarkable and moving memoirs – without him we might well not have had the novels we prize so highly. They were a synergic duo, and the diminishment of either diminishes both.

Diminishment is A. N. Wilson's stock-in-trade (and not only in the case of the 'Bayleys;' his admiration for C. S. Lewis had also turned to hatred by the end of his iconoclastic biography of him). When I first entitled this essay, 'The Good, the Nice, and the Ugly' it was as a simple one to one correspondence: Iris Murdoch was the good and John Bayley the nice ("Iris is good. I'm not good inside, but I can get by on being nice" [*Iris*, 171]), leaving A. N. Wilson as the somewhat tritely obvious candidate for the third adjective. During the course of writing, however, the crudeness of this correlation has been refined into subtler shades of perception. Indubitably there is ugliness in Wilson's book as there is in the whole unedifying literary feud it provoked. Equally there is goodness, *malgre lui*, in John Bayley's devoted care for Iris Murdoch in her illness. And there is ugliness in Iris Murdoch herself as well as goodness as she herself would not have been

[7] Gerrard, cited in Joanna Gill, "Someone Else's Misfortune: The Vicarious Pleasures of the Confessional Text," in *Journal of Popular Culture*, Summer 2001: 35 (1), 81-93.
[8] John Wiltshire, "Biography, Pathography, and the Recovery of Meaning." In *The Cambridge Quarterly* 2000, XXIX (4): 409-422, 409.
[9] John Wiltshire, 412.
[10] John Wiltshire, 418.
[11] John Wiltshire, 418.
[12] John Wiltshire, 419.
[13] John Bayley, "Creating, or Recreating the Dead," In *Essays in Criticism* 2001, 51(1), 139-144, 140.
[14] John Bayley, "Creating, or Recreating the Dead," 141.

slow to confess – one must beware hagiography.[15] Life *is* a mixture of good and evil, niceness and nastiness, beauty and ugliness, and literature reflects it. This mix can be seen no less in John Bayley's *Iris* Trilogy than in Iris Murdoch's novels and gives this both highly-esteemed *and* much-maligned writer a claim to have these works, however they may be sub-classified, regarded as literature, which will, I believe, outlast the temporary, contemporary conflict currently surrounding them. His name as well as hers will live. As for A. N. Wilson … a forgotten footnote to Literary History, like the Cibbers and Tibbalds of Pope's *Dunciad*.

Frances White
Co. Clare, Eire
August 2005

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Wendy Vaizey explores how far Murdoch's fictional writers may reveal some self-interrogation and self-revelation regarding her own role as a writer.

"Lifting up their faces to the heat of the risen sun": Murdoch and Authorship

Throughout her long career, Iris Murdoch persistently interrogates the role of literary art, and literary artists. In *Under the Net*, she begins with an examination of the viability of language as a suitable vehicle for truth. In novels including *The Black Prince* and *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, she returns to examine issues of morality and authorship (which she sees as inseparable). Finally, in *Jackson's Dilemma*, she represents the disintegration of a writer and the disempowerment of the muse figure, Jackson. As she notes in her study of Sartre, "as language may solidify and kill our thoughts, so our values may be solidified if we do not subject them to a continual process of breaking down and re-building" (*Sartre*, 45). This process of breaking down and re-building her thoughts and beliefs about writing, and, by implication, her assessment of her own role as a writer, means that from her first novel to her last, Murdoch questions herself and her art through narratives that both critique and justify modes of literary activity.

Murdoch's novels about writers reflect both on her earlier thought about literary art and extend towards fresh territory. Whereas the earlier writing is more overtly philosophical, referring to the thought of Plato, Wittgenstein, and particularly influenced by Sartre, in later work the presentation of such ideas is more diffuse and co-exists with original thought expressed by self-referential artistry. In particular, in *The Black Prince* Murdoch newly defines ideas about a writer's presence or absence in the text. However, since commentators have written extensively on the intricate deceptions and self-deceptions of the writer-figures of *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince*, I touch upon these novels only briefly here. *The Black Prince's* meditation on human suffering is influenced by the thought of Simone Weil and implies that a debatable degree of masochism is inherent in the artistic project. Nevertheless, the moral danger for a writer of living life intensely, even melodramatically, while a separate 'artist' part of the being, which has a different and perhaps less humane motivation, looks on and observes, is not comprehensively addressed in *The Black Prince*. But it is an aspect that Murdoch considers in her next novel, *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*.

Montague Small, the detective fiction writer of that novel, is, unlike some of Murdoch's characters, fairly good at paying attention to other people. According to Murdoch's usual idea play, this should make him both a good person and a good artist. Monty is outside the novel's main triangular drama, but he watches the situation from close proximity and becomes involved at key moments. Whereas Bradley Pearson dreads involvement with others' problems, Monty is less Puritanical, observing: "How readily, how naturally, one makes a home inside the misfortunes of others" (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, 152). Monty tends to live his life as if he were a fictional character; for example, "his brief love affairs had been self-conscious egocentric dramas" (97). He also treats others as if they were fictional characters, helping to set up situations that profoundly affect their lives in order to satisfy his curiosity and amuse himself; a trait he shares with Julius King of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. However, although he shows more empathy than Julius and the self-absorbed Bradley, Monty is careful to avoid involvement that might entail his own suffering. He is perhaps a version of what Bradley might have become had he not fallen in love and undergone the subsequent ordeal of the trial.

[15] Galen Strawson, 'Telling Tales'. In *The Guardian*, 6 September, 2003.

Monty struggled against his mother's love as a matter of survival, believing that it would engulf him. It is in opposition to love, then, that he positions his famous fictional character: "[s]omewhere inside that silent contest there came into being the embryo of Milo Fane" (96). Indeed, Monty's coldness and that of his ruthless alter-ego result from this resistance to love, coupled with a love for power. The hunger for power over others gives Monty a motivation to act kindly: he listens to their troubles and offers helpful advice. However, the recipients of his sympathy become his unwitting prey; when questioning Harriet about David, for example, Monty is aware that he inflicts pain: "It was not that he wanted to needle her, he just wanted to be sure that she had seen everything, that they had looked at it together. Harriet, still gazing, frowned with pain" (150). Moreover, as soon as Harriet tries to involve Monty directly in the drama he backs away, clinging to his outsider's role:

> He felt, he told himself, no dangerous degree of affection for Harriet, but he did feel affection and a sort of sense of responsibility for her. He also felt a considerably less pure-minded interest in her predicament and curiosity to see how it would develop. This mean little interest and curiosity were, in their way, a sort of mediocre consolation to him since they were a genuine distraction from his bereavement. (178)

Even when Monty teeters on the edge of self-awareness, then, he fails to modify the sadistic elements of his behaviour.

Monty's motivation, in other words, is not that of a friend, but that of a novelist looking for dramatic possibilities and effects. Just as Milo Fane looks for a victim's weak point and slices through a man's Achilles' tendon (215), his creator looks for a weak point whereby a drama might be enacted. A machine constantly on the alert for stories, Monty makes little differentiation between real and fictional people. After he watches a Milo Fane episode on television, we see Monty exemplify Milo's coldness: "he had evidently missed the news. No consolations tonight in the form of floods, earthquakes, massacres, hijackings, public executions, murders or wars. Nothing to laugh at, at all, in fact" (215). Here, Monty's writer's alertness for potential material degrades reality, and thereby degrades morality. Further, by likening Monty's ruthlessness to Milo's, Murdoch illustrates that, not unlike a detective infiltrating a criminal ring, a writer cannot write convincingly about evil without understanding it intimately. With such understanding, the danger of corruption inevitably arises.

Despite Monty's attempts to fictionalise reality, however, his life refuses to comply. When Harriet, David, Luca, Edgar and his mother all move into his house, it is as if his invented characters have arrived to persecute him. He not only wants to kill his genuine inventions, mentioning "the purging of Milo, the deflating of Magnus" (223), but he later sets about trying to purge and deflate both non-fictional and fictional aspects of his life: he rejects Harriet and Edgar's love, and makes Magnus commit suicide. When he tells Harriet about the suicide, he enjoys the omniscience of his position: "He looked at her with pity, but also with a curious exhilaration" (274). Nevertheless, although he tries to evade and exterminate them, certain characters continue to haunt him; Pinn in his bedroom, and Sophie in his dreams.

The failure of love with Sophie obsesses him. In their relationship he looks for melodramas and plot, rather than love and acceptance; and Sophie in her turn plays along. Sophie maddens him because he fails to dominate and manipulate her, and when Monty kills her, it is not to save her from suffering. Especially when she is dying he cannot control her, since unlike a created character, she owns a separate consciousness. Finally, the moment arrives when, the god-like, ultimate author, he seizes control: "'I just couldn't stand it any longer – her talk – her consciousness – and I took her by the throat and squeezed – and – then I stopped and – she was dead'" (264). In killing her, he regains mastery of the plot: "'I chose the moment of her death, I chose the moment when she should go" (265). In this way, author becomes psychopath: he kills Sophie, he kills Magnus; indirectly, he kills Harriet, and he wants to kill Milo. However, perhaps because they are so alike, Milo is the one character Monty cannot really kill. Blaise describes Monty as "a dreaming god making things happen in an awful trance … just Milo in the end with intellect instead of nerve" (305).

The common feature of Monty and Milo is their coldness, and this quality leads ultimately to Monty's failure as a writer. "'We discover ourselves in affliction,'" Monty tells Harriet (238). And yet, unlike Bradley Pearson, Monty is not able to take the opportunity to unself, or focus on others, as he could have after the death of Sophie. Another opportunity is missed when he goes to bed with Kiki St Loy, but takes no responsibility for the girl, who falls in love with him: "Monty did not think now, is this good, is this bad? He simply responded to it" (289). With these failures and with his rejections of Harriet and Edgar, Monty remains a prurient outsider, and his artistic failure is a failure of love. In this novel, then, Murdoch paints the writer as egotistical puppet-master, and her portrayal is a study in artistic and moral corruption.

Although Murdoch departs from the male first-person narration of her previous novel, *The Black Prince*, the third-person narration of *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* dwells most intimately within its characters' perceptions.

Murdoch's last novel, *Jackson's Dilemma* does not feature a novelist, but it nevertheless reflects implicitly on writing, and the disintegration of a writer. Benet Barnell has somehow 'lost the plot' of his life, whereas, by contrast, Jackson seems to know the plot very well indeed. He is farsighted and intuitive, able to make connections and enable resolutions, for example by reuniting Marian and Cantor. (Indeed, Peter Conradi describes Jackson as a possible "surrogate novelist" [*The Saint & the Artist*, 361.]) But mystery surrounds him; he does not appear until chapter six and is missing for much of the novel. He is presented, half-jokily, as a mythical creature who is not quite human: "[t]he legend was that Benet had discovered Jackson curled up in a cardboard box late one night and had adopted him as weird animal which he imagined he could tame" (*Jackson's Dilemma*, 71). Hinting at a Platonic love that posits a divided whole, Mildred and other friends advance the idea that his relationship with Benet is fated, a possibility noted with wistful incredulity: "*Can* it be that one particular person, sent by the gods, is singled out for another person?" (71).

As Benet trundles from room to room wrestling with his treatise on Heidegger, he is like a novelist in the grip of writer's block, struggling to construct dramatic episodes: "He thought, I can do no good. I am blundering about among the miseries of a chaotic scene which I myself have brought about" (70). Such scenes of authorial anxiety are somehow, obliquely or by juxtaposition, connected to Jackson; for example, after wandering about the house weeping for Odysseus, Benet finds himself for no logical reason "reflecting upon a quite different matter which now increasingly distressed him. It was Jackson" (70). Just as Odysseus longs for home, Benet is drawn towards Jackson by an equally strong magnetism. Indeed, by their respective characteristics Benet and Jackson resemble a single writer who has been divided. Benet is the earthbound, labouring, human part of the writer and Jackson is the recalcitrant, absentee muse who is badly needed for the apparent miracles that only he can perform, and without whom Benet cannot write, even though Benet at several moments perversely repels him. In Platonic terms, Benet represents the material body and Jackson the essence or soul. There is a quasi-erotic current in Benet's need for Jackson, as if the desire to write is a kind of Eros or unrequited erotic desire. However, although the novel's resolution reunites the two halves, instead of assisting Benet to transcend his earthly nature, Jackson loses or relinquishes his powers, like an angel who gives up eternal life to live as a human. For Benet, there is no more talk of the Heidegger project, and whereas in *Under the Net*, Jake puts aside his translations to write novels, in *Jackson's Dilemma*, Benet, who once thought of writing a novel, has already put his away. When the Heidegger treatise is also abandoned, it is with finality that Benet has "put down his pen" (209); indeed, Jackson does not return until he does so. There is a sense, therefore, in which the reunification with Benet is ineffectual, implying the disintegration of the writer's ability, and the impossibility of transcendence.

A trajectory emerges, then, in Murdoch's continued representation of novelists or would-be novelists. Writers begin their careers, like Jake Donaghue, as oversensitive and solipsistic individuals who must learn to engage with the world outside themselves to become good artists. There may later come a stage when writers are prepared, like Bradley Pearson, to live their own lives as a drama in order to intensify the artistic process. In doing so, they may achieve their highest artistic potential. Later, however, scourged by painful experience, or afraid to meet that experience in the first place, writers may seek to protect themselves from the consequences of living dramatically and, like Iago, encourage others to enact dramas for their aesthetic satisfaction. This latter process gives a sense of power, but empathy for the other characters in the drama is curtailed. In these instances, a writer's development or lack of it is fused with his moral condition: according to Murdoch's portrayals, egotistical, manipulative writers such as Monty Small not only disappoint as people; they must also founder artistically.

While each of these novels represents a step in the evolution of a writer, each also mirrors or opposes aspects of earlier portrayals. For example, Bradley Pearson might be Jake Donaghue grown old and fussy and in danger of reverting to solipsism. Julian Baffin, on the other hand, appears to be a prototype for Monty Small. Like Monty she has undergone a terrible ordeal, with the early death of somebody close to her. Like Monty, she takes refuge in coldness and this affects her art; in her postscript, she asserts that "[t]rue art is very very cold" (*The Black Prince*, 410). Therefore, Julian and Monty demonstrate a similar flaw; that is, a failure of love. In this way, Murdoch makes connections in her novels about writers between art, morality and love that are echoed in her philosophical writings:

> Art and morality are, with certain provisos […], one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the

> extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality. ("The Sublime and the Good", 215)

Perhaps inevitably, the arc created by Murdoch's portrayal of writers, and her own writing career, ends with the process of breaking down rather than rebuilding. Her penultimate novel *The Green Knight*, for example, although it is not about a writer, implicitly deconstructs any idea of authorial authority, while *Jackson's Dilemma* takes this process to its conclusion. At the end of the latter novel an atmosphere of sadness and impending death permeates the territory even as the sun rises over the field where Spencer, the elegant elderly horse, subsides into the grass. There is, however, at least a moment when Spencer and the boy Bran stand in the light, "lifting up their faces to the heat of the risen sun" (*Jackson's Dilemma*, 248). The image of the sun and the horse recalls Plato in both the *Phaedrus* and the myth of the cave, evoking the journey from illusion and reality, and the idea, for all its difficulty of achievement, of Eros as a route to transcendence: "So at last it comes about that the soul of the lover waits upon his beloved in reverence and awe…." (*Phaedrus*, 8).

Wendy Vaizey
Kingston University, 2005

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Frances White: A non-professional Delegate's-eye view of the 2nd International Iris Murdoch Conference, held at Kingston University, 17th -18th September 2004.

I think Iris Murdoch would be both surprised and delighted could she have seen the gathering of around one hundred delegates who met to share their enjoyment of her work, and their conviction that it is of lasting importance in the fields of both English Literature and Moral Philosophy. Surprised because of her innate humility; delighted because it seems that her early-avowed desire to provide "something for everybody" (*Iris*, 25) has been realised. These delegates ranged from students barely out of their teens (reminding me irresistibly of Toby Gashe or Tom McCaffrey), to octogenarians with hearing-aids, and included professors of literature and doctors of philosophy, teachers, artists, poets, psychiatrists, book-sellers, priests and housewives. We came from all over the world to celebrate Iris Murdoch and her work together – England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, Holland, France, Romania and Spain, Africa, India and Japan, and many different States of America. Some were scholars of distinction and experts on her work, others (like the present writer) just devotees of her books, 'fans', I suppose, if that word didn't conjure up an image of unthinking hysteria. For thinking was very much what we were there to do, and the experience validated the sense Iris Murdoch's novels unusually offer of the pleasure and excitement of serious thought.

Iris Murdoch's friend, critic and biographer, Professor Peter Conradi both caught and set the tone of the conference in his opening speech of welcome when he recalled Willy Kost in *The Nice and the Good*, telling Theo that he has to go on with his apparently unimportant and self-imposed task simply because "it expresses my love for Propertius and my love for Latin"(*NG*, 126). All the subsequent lectures, seminar papers and discussions arising from these, sprang from a love of Iris Murdoch. And a great intellectual feast was provided: the Plenary Sessions included a fire-work display of 'tactful reading' of Iris Murdoch's Imaginaire from Professor Valentine Cunningham (which must have sent many other hearers besides this one hurrying to find his *Reading after Theory*), and a closely textual consideration of *The Bell* from Dr Bran Nicol on the Literature side. These were balanced by a meticulously argued re-examination of Iris Murdoch's view of the ontological argument for the existence of Good from Dr Stephen Mulhall, and a new look at the dynamic of the saint/artist dichotomy (or is it?) from Professor Maria Antonaccio on the Philosophical side. The four Seminars and nine panels (which took in twenty-six papers, on subjects ranging through metaphysics and modernism, architecture and theology, influences and canonicity, to pick out but a few) were a *smorgasbord* of tempting offerings and indeed the only 'criticism' of the Conference that I heard voiced was that it was too *short* – people wished to hear *everything* that was available and regretted the necessity and difficulty of choosing amongst the options! (We look forward to the forthcoming publication of the Conference Proceedings which will enable us to 'fill in the gaps'.)

Having thus been able only to attend a few of the sessions offered, it is not possible to comment fully, but an example from one of the Panels I joined and enormously enjoyed will suffice to illustrate the other aspect of Iris Murdoch's breadth of appeal which the conference evidenced. Three fascinating, well-

argued, beautifully-expressed (and delivered) disquisitions on Iris Murdoch and Theology were given, each of them wholly convincing in itself though presenting apparently mutually contradictory views of her thought! An impassioned case was made for an eclectic Hindu/Buddhist/Judaic reading of the later novels and a quietly passionate claim was made for an orthodoxly Roman Catholic mystical interpretation of others. It seems that Iris Murdoch has at least in part succeeded in taking on the mantle of her beloved Shakespeare in giving expression to the feelings and experiences of a wide variety of world views and personalities, so that many from different traditions and stances feel able to claim her and find themselves portrayed and understood by her. It became evident how very much more there is to share about her work, how much more to say and to write, and in conversations over coffee-breaks and the (excellent) lunches, one could almost hear the sparks as minds ignited from each other's ideas, leaving many of us to go away inspired with new thoughts and projects.

The special moment at the heart of the conference was the Launch of the new Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies at Kingston University, and the heart of the heart, so to speak, was the few and moving words from Professor John Bayley. His presence gave much joy, as did the opportunity not only to see the books belonging to Iris Murdoch (recently purchased by Kingston University as a result of the Appeal spearheaded by the Iris Murdoch Society) but actually to hold and read them, as small groups visited the archive throughout the two days.

Thanks are due from all the delegates to the librarians who facilitated this, to Professor Avril Horner and the staff of Kingston University for their hospitality, and above all, to Dr Anne Rowe whose hard work so successfully created a memorable and inspirational second conference for all those of us who love Iris Murdoch – please make the next one longer!

Frances White
Co. Clare, Eire
October 2004

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Proceedings of the Conference held at Kingston University on 17 & 18 September 2004

Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment

After a welcome and introductory speech by Professor Peter Conradi (Emeritus Professor, Kingston University) the plenary speaker, Professor Valentine Cunningham (Corpus Christi College, Oxford), presented a paper entitled "Over and Over Like a Mighty Sea: Inundation, Repetition and Excess in the Post-Christian Imaginaire of Iris Murdoch."

In parallel sessions and seminars, Dr Anne Rowe (Kingston University) chaired a discussion on "The Subject and the Body," which featured the following papers:- Tammy Grimshaw (University of Newcastle), "Power, Knowledge and the 'Subject:' A Foucauldian Reading of *The Bell* and *A Severed Head;*" Rivka Isaacson (Imperial College London), "Alzheimer's Anyloid Analogy: Disease Depicted Through *A Word Child;"* and Jan Skinner (Former Tutor for Oxford University's Dept of Continuing Education), "The Language of the Body as Moral Metaphor: An Approach to Iris Murdoch's *A Fairly Honourable Defeat."*

Professor Avril Horner (Kingston University) chaired a discussion on "Revisiting Murdoch's Moral Philosophy," featuring the following papers:- Scott H. Moore (Baylor University), "'Devilish Metaphysics' and the Say-Show Distinction: Murdoch on Suffering and The Good;" Edith Brugmans (Radbound University, Nijmegen / Leiden University), "'Not without Good and Evil:' Murdoch on the Impossibility of Moral Skepticism;" and Marije Altorf (University of Glasgow and Hyendaal Institute, Nijmegen), "Reassessing Murdoch in the Light of Feminist Philosophy: Michele Le Doeff and the Philosophical Imaginary."

Dr Cheryl Bove of Ball State University led a seminar discussion on *A Fairly Honourable Defeat.*

The afternoon plenary speaker was Dr Stephen Mulhall (New College, Oxford), who presented "'All the World Must be Religious:' Iris Murdoch's Ontological Arguments"

At parallel sessions and seminars Dr Cheryl Bove chaired a discussion on "Murdoch, Goodness and Views of the Self", including papers by:- Samantha Vice (Rhodes University), **"**Self and Self Knowledge in *The Sovereignty of Good;"* Christopher Mole (Princeton University), "Virtue Ethics, Self-Regard and *The*

Sovereignty of Good;" and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar (Dept of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati), "The Concept of Good: Murdoch and Gandhi."

Jan Skinner (former Tutor at Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education) chaired "Murdoch and the Postmodern," which included the following papers:- J. Robert Baker (Fairmont State College, West Virginia), "Iris Murdoch, Emmanuel Levinas and Ethical Alterity;" Jerome Langguth (Thomas More College, Kentucky), "Iris Murdoch and The Postmodern Sublime;" and Alex Ramon (University of Reading), "Accepting the 'Other;' subverting the 'postmodern': Iris Murdoch and Carol Shields."

Dr Anne Rowe (Kingston University) led a seminar discussion on *The Black Prince.*

The launch of the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies concluded the first day of the conference. Professor John Bayley and Mrs Audi Bayley were guests at the launch.

On Saturday 18th September the plenary speaker, Professor Maria Antonaccio (Bucknell University), presented a paper on "The Ascetic Impulse in Murdoch's Thought, or The Saint and The Artist Revisited."

At parallel sessions and seminars, Tammy Grimshaw chaired "Murdoch and Theology," including the following:- Suguna Ramanathan (retired, St.Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, India, "Iris Murdoch's Deconstructive Theology;" Sue Yore (University of York), "Iris Murdoch: A Postmodern Mystic?"; Stella Prozesky (University of South Africa), "Aspects of the Sign of the Christ in Murdoch's Writing."

Avril Horner chaired "Murdoch: Influences", which featured:- Priscilla Martin (St Edmund's Hall, Oxford), "Houses of Fiction: Iris Murdoch and Henry James;" and Julian Preece (University of Kent), "Iris Murdoch and Elias Canetti."

In a separate teaching panel, Dr Cheryl Bove, Professor Tony Edmonds and Dr Joanne Edmonds (Ball State University), Jan Skinner (Dept of Continuing Education, Oxford), Professor J Robert Baker, (Fairmont College, Virginia), Jerome Langguth (Thomas Moore College, Kentucky) Dr Anne Rowe (Kingston University) and other speakers who have taught Murdoch's work discussed ways of approaching and teaching Iris Murdoch's novels. Teachers, students and general readers of Murdoch's novels joined the discussion.

The afternoon plenary speaker, Dr Bran Nicol (Portsmouth University), presented a paper on "The Curse of The Bell: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Narrative."

Parallel sessions and seminars followed. "Murdoch: Art and Architecture" was chaired by Avril Horner and included:- Cheryl Bove (Ball State University), "A Narrative of Connections: Revisiting Iris Murdoch's London"; June Sturrock (Simon Fraser University, Canada), "Only Looking: Murdoch, Byatt, Powell and the Art Gallery;" and Mark McLean (University of Aberdeen), "Iris Murdoch and Contemporary Accounts of How Art Makes us Good."

J. Robert Baker chaired "Issues of Metaphysics," which featured the following papers:- Margaret Douglas Carstarphen (Texas A & M University), "Murdoch and the Distinction Between Metaphysics and Ethics;" and David Robjant (University of Wales, Lampeter), "Roquentin's Doubts and Murdoch's way of Beginning Philosophy."

Tammy Grimshaw chaired "Murdoch, Language and Authorship" featuring:- Nick Turner (University of Manchester), "Murdoch's Place in the Modern Canon;" Seogkwang Lee (University of Sussex), "*The Black Prince*: Silence and Language Use;" and Anne Rowe (Kingston University), "'Dancing the Dance of Creation': Ideas of authorship in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince."*

Finally, Jan Skinner led a seminar discussion on *The Bell.*

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Editorial Column

IMNL SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTS:

This year the *Iris Murdoch News Letter* is offering a choice supplements which can be requested from Penny Tribe at p.tribe@kingston.ac.uk. They are:

- a full annotated index to Iris Murdoch's novels compiled by Hazel Bell
- a character index to *Jackson's Dilemma* complied by Cheryl Bove
- a short guide to recent publications on Iris Murdoch in Holland, compiled by Marije Altorf.

Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank Margaret Drabble and *The New Statesman* for kindly giving permission to publish the review of John Bayley's *The Power of Delight* which was first published in *The New Statesman* on 16th May, 2005. We would also like to thank Peter Conradi and *The Guardian* for permission to publish the review of Elias Canetti's *Party in the Blitz*, first published in the *Guardian* on 9th July, 2005.

Publication of 2004 Conference Papers

A selection of papers from the September 2004 Conference held at Kingston University, *Iris Murdoch: A Re-Assessment*, edited by Anne Rowe, is to be published by Palgrave in 2006. If any members specifically wish to read any of the papers listed in the conference summary above, please email Anne Rowe at Kingston University who will advise.

The Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies

The Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies now houses Iris Murdoch's working library form the study of her home in Oxford, Peter Conradi's working archive, accrued during the course of his writing of Iris Murdoch's official biography, and a substantial collection of primary and secondary texts relating to the life and work of Iris Murdoch. Since the opening of the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies at the Conference held at Kingston University in 2004, letter runs have been donated by Janine Canan, Chery Bove and Suguna Ramanathan as well as other smaller individual donations. A large letter run of over 200 letters written by Iris Murdoch to Roly Cochrane, a teacher and writer, has also recently been acquired by the Centre.

An Archive Acquisitions Committee has been established to consider any material that becomes available to the archive. The committee comprises Dr Anne Rowe, Professor Avril Horner, Professor Peter Conradi, Dr Cheryl Bove, Dr Priscilla Martin, Dr Bran Nicol and Jane Savidge, Head of Learning and Research Support at Kingston University.

If any member of the Iris Murdoch Society has any memories they would like to record, any letters or other items relating to Iris Murdoch that they would like to donate to the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies, please contact Anne Rowe at a.rowe@kingston.ac.uk.

Annual Subscription

The annual subscription for membership to the Iris Murdoch Society has been increased to £10 per year. The subscription income and any donations above this amount will be used to support future acquisitions to the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies.

2006 Conference: "Iris Murdoch and Morality": Call for Papers

The next International Conference on Iris Murdoch Entitled "Iris Murdoch and Morality" will be held at Kingston University on September 15th and 16th 2006. The Conference will explore any aspect of Murdoch's novels or philosophy that relates to current debates about morality. We shall also be pleased to receive papers for panels on specific topics relating to the moral issues raised in individual novels.
Abstracts of up to 300 words should be sent to Penny Tribe at Kingston University by 30th May 2006
Address: Penny Tribe, Conference Administrator, Kingston University, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Penrhyn Road, Kingston, Surrey, KT1 2EE
Tel – 44 (0) 208 547 2000. Email: p.tribe@kingston.ac.uk.

The Iris Murdoch Society

The Iris Murdoch News Letter is the publication of The Iris Murdoch Society, which was formed at the Modern Language Association Convention in New York City in December 1986. It appears annually, offering a forum for short articles, reviews and notices, and keeps members of the society informed of new publications, symposia and other news that has a bearing on the life and work of Iris Murdoch.

If you would like to join the Iris Murdoch Society and automatically receive the News Letter please write to the American or European contact.

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Treasurer's Report: The Star Financial Bank (USA) Balance as of June 30, 2005 was $812.48. The Iris Murdoch Society balance in the Halifax Building Society, Kingston, Surrey, UK as of June 30th 2005 was £428.03

The Iris Murdoch Society

News Letter

Kingston University, UK and Ball State University, USA
Autumn 2006, Number 19
ISSN 1528-4379

Iris Murdoch Society

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY

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Iris Murdoch and Wales

The following article by Peter Conradi was written for, and originally appeared in, *The Journal of the Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*, 2006.

During an early one-to-one conversation with Iris Murdoch in an Edinburgh pub in November 1982, she recited the well-known doggerel, 'Radnorshire, poor Radnorshire/ Never a Park nor never a Deer/ Never a Squire with Five hundred a Year/ Excepting Squire Fowler/ Of Abbeycwmhir'. I was writing my PhD on her work and she was giving the Gifford lectures on Natural Theology at the University. This recitation must have happened because I told her I lived partly in Radnorshire.

By that time she and her husband, John Bayley, had started to weekend occasionally with George Clive and his mother, Lady Mary, sister-in-law of Anthony Powell, at their eighteenth century red-brick house and splendid grounds, Whitfield, in Herefordshire. The Bayleys had met the Clives through their friends, Reynolds Stone (the engraver) and his wife, Janet. When staying at Whitfield they made jaunts to such spots as Kilpeck and Bredwardine, on the Radnorshire border. Powell was of course proud of his own Radnorshire roots, and researched them thoroughly, his family coming originally from Brilley.

None of us knew then that Dame Iris would spend an appreciable part of 1997 and 1998 (her last two years and afflicted with Alzheimer's) - probably one week in three and an aggregate of seven or eight months - with us at Cascob, in Radnorshire itself. So she must be counted a writer who spent as much time in Radnorshire as Wordsworth or Shelley. Before giving an account of that period, some words on the small place afforded to Wales in her novels is in order.

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The pre-eminent novelist and philosopher Dame Iris Murdoch was born in Dublin in 1919, and died in Oxford in 1999. She identified early and passionately with the Anglo-Irish ancestry claimed by her mother's family, the Richardsons. That this was – or had once been – an 'Ascendancy background', with its big houses in Co. Tyrone, was never precisely stated, but somehow also never disavowed. In any case, such ancestry was, by the twentieth century, safely and romantically distant. The family had come down in the world.

I was startled to discover how far when writing Dame Iris's biography between 1996 and 2001: her maternal aunt, Gertie Bell, who married Thomas Bell, a car-mechanic from Dublin's Talbot Street and who early became an alcoholic, produced four sons, none of whom had tertiary education, and three of whom worked for Cadbury's in Dublin as fitter, storeman, and long-distance lorry-driver respectively.[1] If by 'Anglo-Irish' is meant a 'Protestant on a horse', a big house, the world of Molly Keane or of Bowen's Court, this was not it.

Gertie's husband, Thomas Bell, and his war-time comrade, Hughes Murdoch – Iris's father – had both served as second lieutenants during the Great War in King Edward's Horse. There must, afterwards, have been a double courtship. The marriages of the two sisters were also hasty, Gertie

[1] *Iris Murdoch: a Life* (London, 2001), Chapter One: 'You ask how Irish she is?'

giving birth to Iris's first cousin, Victor, four months later and three weeks before Iris was born at the identical address, probably in the same room, and only six months after her parents had wed. Iris was *una bambina di sette mesi*.

Murdoch's two surviving and respectable Ulster first cousins on her father's side, whom I visited, recalled nothing of – and probably never learnt of the existence of – these other first cousins on her mother's side[2] (nor was there any Murdoch witness to Iris's parents' marriage certificate). Infrequently she would boast in interview of having Catholic as well as Protestant Irish relatives, as if to lay claim, as the Anglo-Irish so often have, to being emotionally identified with, and being a suitable spokesperson for, the entire Irish polity.[3] The nearest Catholic relatives I found were the wives of two of these Bell first cousins, and children of her eldest cousin, Victor. Most of these she never met. Like many novelists, Murdoch was a myth-maker in her private life as much as in her fiction.

Her mythical, private map of the universe privileged especially Ireland, where she placed two novels – *The Unicorn* and *The Red and the Green* – and London, where almost all her other novels are set. When her characters, who come generally from the intelligentsia, want to escape, they travel, like their real-life counterparts, to France, or get academic jobs in the United States. London is their epicentre, and Scotland and Wales get few mentions, as places to holiday in but not reside. Wales itself must have signified early for her the way to the Holyhead ferry for Ireland, which in her childhood she got to by train, after the War sometimes by car.

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Pembrokeshire figures in one of her best romances, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), which re-works the plot of *Much Ado about Nothing* in contemporary London. Iris Murdoch and John Bayley had stayed there, at a cottage near the coast belonging to Janet Stone's sister, who was married to an Oxfordshire prep school head-master called Pike – an uneventful weekend that scarcely appears in her journals:

> **Sept 2 1967.** We went to Dorset in early August & on with Janet and Reynolds to cottage in Pembrokeshire.

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[2] Muriel Chapman, the Belfast cousin closest by far to Murdoch, who lived on the mainland for one year during World War II, had, alas, died in 1995, before I could talk to her. It is possible that Murdoch's failure to disclose the existence of Gertie Bell and her four sons to her remaining two 'black Protestant' Belfast cousins, Muriel's siblings, arose less because she was ashamed, more because she feared their censoriousness.

Moreover, Billy Lee, widower of Murdoch's quasi-cousin Eva, in Dublin, made clear to me (c.1998) that the Lees, by contrast, knew the details of Gertie Richardson's life and family very well indeed, with Eva Lee probably dealing with Gertie's burial in 1957. Murdoch sent Gertie Bell's family money after they made clear that a remittance would help, probably twice in the 1960s, after her big success with *The Bell*.

Murdoch and her mother, however, did have a habit of selective reticence if not concealment: this is clear from the fact that Murdoch's mother's common-law husband and carer for the last ten years of her life (1975-85), Max Sing (a man without social pretensions who had, before retirement, worked in a car-factory), did not recall being told that Murdoch's mother, Rene, had a sister and four nephews and was startled to learn of this on the telephone from Philippa Foot only around 2001. And lastly, a copy of the photo from around 1934 of Murdoch, Rene, and Gertie's son, Victor Bell, survives (and is reproduced in *Iris Murdoch: A Life*) from which Victor Bell has been cut off with scissors. Alcoholism ran in the family, probably afflicting Rene and Gertie's father, then indisputably both Gertie and, in her last years, Rene herself.

[3] Until 1968 and the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, she identified with the underdog. England had destroyed Ireland, one of the characters argues, in her novel *The Red and The Green*, 'slowly and casually, without malice, without mercy, practically without thought, like someone who treads upon an insect, forgets it, then sees it quivering and treads upon it a second time'.

With the instinctive thrift of an expert writer, she none the less stored up details of this cottage, and put them to use the following year when she was composing the novel. For the plot she needed somewhere near enough to London for her character to reach within a day, yet remote, so that the disasters she has in mind for Hilda Foster, who stays there, can happen un-aided by neighbours. Hilda is to be telephoned with news of an imposture that has put her marriage at risk, and elects from vanity to be the one to give this good news to her husband. But she drops the telephone, which breaks, surreally exposing its wire-guts, then wanders all night, like a lover from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, on the Pembrokeshire moors while, unbeknown to her, her husband, full of sleeping-pills and alcohol, drowns from despair.

Accordingly the cottage is two miles from the sea, six miles from the main road, and further than that from the nearest village. It is approached by a rough track which runs between mossy brambly mounds that had once been stone walls, the only nearby habitation now being an empty farmhouse. Like many places in her novels, it has a vivid presence which you don't easily forget, with its dark pools, glittering boulders, heather and watercress.

I recall only two Welsh characters from her twenty-six novels. One is the actress Rosina Vamburgh in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), of whom we learn that she is beautiful though boss-eyed, passionately jealous and possessive, fiery-tempered, varnishes her finger-nails, and is able to run at speed in high heels. How much and how little any of these qualities relates to her Welsh origins is left for the reader to determine: she is deracinated through being a famous and successful actress, and does not employ her slight Welsh accent when on stage.

The other, perhaps more artfully Welsh character is Owen Secombe-Hughes in *An Accidental Man* (1971), a shabby, failed photographer working from a Hammersmith semi-basement, whither he pretends to arrive each morning, having in fact slept there the night before on a camp-bed. He relieves himself in the garden, leaving a foxy stench. Ill-luck, the betting-shop, the pub and – or so he romances – women have all played a part in his failure. He borrows money from his overweight assistant, ex-athlete Mitzi Ricardo, and ogles her too, and writes a 500-line poem about her in Welsh. Mitzi is not in love with Owen, but feels sorry for him.

His Welshness is lightly – if not platitudinously – sketched. He once won a small prize at an Eisteddfod. He has his own ‘special Welsh devil’. His eyes glitter ‘like a slate-quarry’. He wears a ‘bowed Druidic persona’ and has a ‘bardic smile’. He dreams of a return to his sea-side village – not far, we infer, from Aberystwyth – where there are seals, crabs and – as he lyrically claims – ‘wet rocks as pink as the dawn and little secret inlets where the sea is like cream and there is light yellow seaweed like light tossed hair. And the cormorant flits like a ghost low over the waves. And there is solitude and the wild pained cry of the seagull’ (151).

This is all fairly schematically done in a derivative and easy short-hand. The habit of English novelists visiting Wales for light relief within their fictions, then condescending to their Welsh characters (whom the reader is to agree to find humorous) goes back far beyond Waugh's *Decline and Fall* to (at least) those pedigree-obsessed curiosities, Mrs Cadwallader in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and Mrs Woodcourt in Dickens's *Bleak House*, the latter interestingly omitted from Andrew Davies's recent television adaptation. Perhaps Shakespeare is the first English writer thus to view Wales, though

his Fluellen, Glendower and Sir Hugh Evans are, of course, inward portraits, and by no means simple parodies.

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Murdoch often publicly deplored the habit of novelists putting their friends into their work or borrowing from life, apart from situational logic, which she seems to have felt could fairly and reasonably be exploited: thus one sub-plot concerning the fate of a big house in her novel *Henry and Cato* perhaps distantly echoes Whitfield politics. I had always assumed that she obeyed her own self-denying ordinance until I discovered that her journals openly identify Hugo Belfounder – in her first published novel *Under the Net* (1954) – as a portrait of her mentor Yorick Smythies; and until I discovered also that she recognisably used her lover and friend Elias Canetti as model for three differently malevolent characters : Mischa Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) and Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978).

When, in the autumn of 1942, Iris (fresh from an Oxford First) arrived to work in the Treasury, she spent many evenings in the pubs and clubs of Fitzrovia, where she found truer soul-mates than within the frosty Civil Service. One fellow Bohemian there was Keidrych Rhys, born William Ronald Rees Jones, who changed this presumably to sound more Welsh. The Ceidrych is a small river that runs near his birth-place, Blaensawdde near Llanddeusant in Carmarthenshire. Murdoch kept in her album, and so presumably valued, a photograph of him wearing, if I remember rightly, tweeds.

He was an influential figure because of his journal, *Wales*, which he had launched in 1937 with the motto, 'Though we write in English, we are rooted in Wales'. Wales served during the war years and later as a 'virtual abroad' for writers and artists, and was glamorized by periodicals such as *Horizon*, which Iris was certainly reading, as an ambitious apprentice writer herself, hoping to be published and seeking appropriate friends and connections.

There were two puzzles about Rhys that might now be illuminated together. One is that John Bayley, who met him in 1953 or 1954, recalls Rhys as among the many war-time suitors who wished to marry Iris. The other is how Iris came to know Dylan Thomas, with whom she once claimed to have danced at the Gargoyle during the war. Murdoch's war-time flat-mate, now the distinguished philosopher, Philippa Foot, does not recall Thomas, nor know how Iris might have met him.

Bayley's recollections of Rhys are of an amiable man, unpretentious, devoted to an idea of Iris, mildly comical, and on the look-out, as any editor must perforce be, for talent and opportunity in others – a 'scalp in the belt'. For her part Murdoch was never in love with Rhys, but certainly felt sorry for him.

The helpful commentator on Welsh cultural matters, M.Wynn Thomas, mentions Rhys and his various contacts in two books, without having great regard for the man himself ('flamboyant', 'brash', 'self-advertising', etc.).[4] By contrast, Glyn Jones starts his *The Dragon has Two Tongues* (1968) with a 'Letter to Keidrych', written in 'affection and gratitude' and with self-evident respect, and later recalls first meeting Rhys in 1936, tall, handsome, dressed in beautiful tweeds and speaking Welsh,

[4] I am grateful to Dr Marged Haycock for her expert and kindly advice, and also to Anne Roberts for her patient and generous help. See *Corresponding Cultures* (Cardiff, 1999), Chapter Three, and another well-received collection of essays, *Internal Differences*.

disconcertingly, with the accent of the English public schools. Meic Stephens's entry for Rhys in the *Dictionary of National Biography* evokes him vividly as a generous and gifted editor, often short of money and so unable to pay contributors, an ebullient personality delighting in controversy and scandal, especially about members of the Welsh establishment 'among whom his paranoia detected many a plot against him'.

Meic Stephens makes clear that Rhys's first marriage, to Lynette Roberts in October 1939, was a secret ceremony, against his parents' wishes, and that the best man was indeed that fellow-Carmarthenshire poet, Dylan Thomas, who once called Rhys 'the best sort of crank'. This first marriage was put under strain by Rhys's prolonged absences on active service and ended in divorce in 1948; the couple had a son and daughter. Meanwhile, Rhys collected and published his poems in *The Van Pool* (1942) and edited three anthologies of verse: *Poems from the Forces* (1941), *More Poems from the Forces* (1943) and *Modern Welsh Poetry* (1944), of which the last was the most influential. He was married for a second time in 1954 to Eva Smith, by whom he had a son. Dylan Thomas was not the only war-time mutual acquaintance or friend of Rhys and Murdoch: both also knew the Sri Lankan poetry editor and fellow Fitzrovian, Tambimuttu, with whom Rhys cooperated in 1956-60 as London editor of Tambimuttu's post-war magazine *Poetry London-New York*.

Rhys lived and died in Heath Street, Hampstead, a life-long supporter of Plaid Cymru, which suggests a willingness to brave contradiction, and also a fine indifference to any discomfort involved in appearing to play a part. He is memorialised in – among many places – the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the *Companion to the Literature of Wales* (ed. Stephens), and two essays in the journal *Planet*.[5] And his papers have recently been acquired by the National Library of Wales. All this suggests a real distance between Rhys and his possible literary counterpart, if that is what Secombe-Hughes is, in that seedy Hammersmith basement.

It is crucial to Secombe-Hughes's paramour, Mitzi, that an accident has caused her to fail as an athlete, and also that she finds love only after a suicide attempt. *An Accidental Man* is – *in part* – a meditation on the condition of failure itself, spiritual and moral, and abounds in characters who have not, in worldly terms, made a success of their lives.[6] I would hazard the guess none the less that, when Murdoch came to create the failed poet, Owen Secombe-Hughes, in 1971, with his 'bardic' smile and 'bowed druidic persona', some memories, conscious or unconscious, of Rhys may have come to her aid. While it would not surprise me if it should one day turn out that Rhys wrote at least one poem to or for Iris, albeit not necessarily one of 500 lines, Meic Stephens recalls none that are in print.

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There is arguably one further Welsh character. A blue-eyed dog called Anax in Murdoch's wonderful 1994 novel *The Green Knight* was based, Iris told us, on our Radnorshire blue merle collie bitch Cloudy (1987-2001). Such albino 'sports' with their grey mixed coats are of course known locally as 'silver-eyes'; in the nineteenth century they were sometimes drowned as pups, by farmers

[5] John Harris's article on Keidrych Rhys in *Planet*, no. 65 (Oct/Nov., 1987), and Alun Richards's in *Planet*, no. 104 (April/May, 1994).
[6] For a closer analysis, see Peter J Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist: A study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* (3rd edition, 2001), pp. 78-84.

superstitious about the apparent power and intensity of their gaze. In 1987 Iris enquired about this dog (about whom we had corresponded) born at Foessidoes Farm, near Kinnerton, when she heard her bark over the telephone: 'I should like to meet that beast'. They met in the autumn of 1988, when the dog, untypically, felt instantly so much at home that she soon fell asleep with her head on Dame Iris's feet in their canvas shoes. On my visiting Dame Iris with Cloudy in Oxford when she was composing *The Green Knight* in 1992, she made careful notes, wrote and also telephoned to check the odd point about the dog's description. Although her fictions are romances, actuality mattered too, and seems to have acted as an anchor to her many flights of imaginative fantasy. She was proud of the exciting adventures she invented for the fictional dog, whose flight across London significantly changes the plot.

In 1993 galleys of this novel were sent me by her Chatto editor, and I noted some slight errors, both in relation to the dog's coat and some less insignificant matters. I sensed that Chatto editors shrank from the sub-editing that her increasingly swollen novels really needed, and later learnt that their well-meaning attempt to edit *The Good Apprentice* (1985) had been met by an icy rebuke from Dame Iris requesting the publishers to 'please put everything back'. This they did, at some expense.

So, on a whim, I wrote to her as if from our dog, in a tone of facetious meekness, making various points that I no longer recall. She replied fast, and equally light-heartedly, addressing herself to the dog, undertaking to make all changes requested. This answer, addressed on the envelope to the dog, is, I think, in the Iris Murdoch archive at Kingston University, together with evidence from the next set of proofs that she really paid attention and made changes. It is a mysterious thought that a letter purporting to be from a Radnorshire dog succeeded where the grand editors of King William IV Street had so signally failed.

Soon Iris had reason to get to know and love this dog much better, as she started to spend time with us at Cascob. It happened, like much of life, accidentally. She and John Bayley drove in May 1995 from Charleston's literary festival in Sussex to a birthday party of mine at Cascob, staying at the Radnorshire Arms, and made it clear that they enjoyed being with us, as did we with them, and wanted to return. There were, in 1996, I think visits of one week each in May and October, and then, after I had taken early retirement from academic life in March 1997, many subsequent visits of one and more weeks. By this stage I was formally engaged as her authorised biographer, and we conducted many interviews and looked at photographs together and she was, in 1997, still able to retrieve names from the past and help.

We knew little about Alzheimer's and had to learn 'on the hoof'. It was soon apparent that John Bayley did not want professional care, which indeed was only used in the last weeks of Dame Iris's life. These Radnorshire visits provided her with a much-needed sense of family. We washed her hair, bathed her and bought her new clothes. When I now recall these distant two years, they are shot through with a strange mixture of grief and joy: happiness taken in each other's company, heartache shared at Dame Iris's ordeal. Beauty of mind gone, that of her spirit remained.

Some activities helped attenuate the anxiety that attends her affliction: drying, brushing and playing with the dog counted high. As the now ageing Cloudy became increasingly arthritic, her pace slowed to meet Dame Iris's. There was also swimming in our pond in summer, gardening, walking on the Radnorshire hills, singing together: Anglican hymns, Irish airs, French *chansons*, English and

Scottish folk-song. Musical memory, we learnt, goes deeper even than the memory of language itself and, late in her life, after she could no longer recall the words, she could happily hum, and danced at Cascob as late as December 1998, weeks before her death at the Vale home in Oxford.

None of us knew then that this death would be re-enacted within two years by Dame Judi Dench in the well-intentioned film, *Iris*, made by Sir Richard Eyre from the first two memoirs written by John Bayley. As for television, the crews did not arrive, mercifully, until the BBC made an *Omnibus* about her life and work in early 2002. By that time, she was no longer with us.

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John Bayley married his second wife and old friend of both Bayleys, Audi Villers, who was born in Norway, from Cascob Church on Saturday 10th June 2000. The Revd Timothy Williams from Knighton and the Revd John Jenkins (now from Aberystwyth, but earlier in his career from Lanzarote where Audi Villers has a house) officiated. The press, who caught wind of this impending marriage, somehow imagined that it had already happened earlier that year in Norway, and so left us in peace. Audi wandered the field beforehand, gathering ox-eye daisies, small red roses and blue cornflowers to braid into her hair, in the Norwegian style; and we gave the guests a champagne 'breakfast' at the Old School afterwards. The unpredictable Radnorshire weather held, and was perfect.

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John Bayley's Radical Innocence

Before the demise of Communism in Eastern Europe, many Western scholars accepted invitations to visit scientific academies, lecture at universities and contribute articles to journals in the countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact. Some of those Westerners shared the Marxist philosophy to which their Eastern colleagues adhered, at least nominally. I say 'nominally' because, in private, many would indicate that they were not even Communist Party members, let alone believers in the myth of the 'workers' paradise'. They certainly did not swallow the propaganda that its citizens were fortunate to live in such a perfect society that they could not possibly wish to leave it, that exit visas were unobtainable because quite unnecessary, and that the Iron Curtain's heavily-fortified frontier was constructed to hold at bay the revanchist ambitions of the 'imperialistic capitalists'.

Other Western academics – the vast majority – were political agnostics who admired the scholarship of their Eastern colleagues, appreciated their generous hospitality and found much in their world to admire: the old-fashioned courtesy, the absence of a drugs culture, the high standards that prevailed in public health, education and transport, and the economic and social equality of the sexes. As one of those sympathetic agnostics, I enjoyed several visits to the German Democratic Republic and

to Hungary and when, in 1982, the Romanian comparative literature journal, *Synthesis*, invited me to contribute an article on John Bayley and the American literary critic and cultural commentator, Ihab Hassan, I was delighted to accept. The journal was not widely distributed in the West and must by now be completely unobtainable. So what follows is a revised and abridged version of that essay.[1] I omit the section on Ihab Hassan, whose writing has become increasingly eccentric with each new book and has not stood the test of time. I labelled it 'radical chic' in 1982 and see no reason to modify that judgement now. Borrowing the title of Hassan's earliest and best book, a study of the post-war American novel,[2] I characterized John Bayley's work as being marked by 'radical innocence', a quality that I believe typifies it to this day.

It is perhaps superfluous in the *Iris Murdoch News Letter* to summarize John Bayley's career. Readers will know that he was born in 1925, attended Eton, served in the Grenadier Guards and Special Intelligence after the war, and then went up to New College, Oxford, where he gained a first in 1950. He taught English at Oxford until his retirement from the Thomas Warton chair in 1992. Apart from some poetry and five novels (see Frances White's essay in *IMNL*, 18, 2005), he has published four general works of literary criticism, books on the short story, on Shakespeare, Pushkin, Tolstoy and Hardy, and innumerable essays, addresses and book reviews, some of them collected (see Margaret Drabble's review, also in *IMNL*, 18, of *The Power of Delight*).[3] He became a household name when his memoir *Iris*, published to great acclaim in 1998, was made soon afterwards into a film with Kate Winslet and Judi Dench in the rôles of the young and the older Iris Murdoch respectively. The book – divided into two parts, 'Then' and 'Now' – movingly contrasts, as does the film, the immensely talented, highly intelligent novelist and academic whom Bayley married in 1956, with the elderly patient suffering from that cruellest of all conditions, Alzheimer's disease, whom he nursed until her death in 1999. As an illness attacking the brain and leading to dementia, Alzheimer's was a taboo subject until Bayley described how it had destroyed his wife's ability to remember anything, and the fact that the condition can now be discussed more openly is due in no small measure to his candid depiction of the ravages of the disease.[4]

Bayley has published two sequels to *Iris* (see Frances White's aforementioned article), but these have not met with the same success. Indeed, apart from *Iris*, he will be remembered chiefly for his critical studies. The first of these was *The Romantic Survival: A Study in Poetic Evolution*, which was published in 1957, the same year as his wife's bestselling novel, *The Sandcastle*.[5] As its title implies, Bayley's first book discusses the survival of Romantic attitudes in modern poetry, and specifically in Yeats, Auden and Dylan Thomas. It leads Bayley to consider the whole question of critical approaches to literature, and in particular that of the so-called 'old-fashioned romantic critic'.

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[1] 'Radical Chic Versus Radical Innocence: A Current Critical Debate?', *Synthesis* (Bucharest), IX (1982), pp.55-66.
[2] Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).
[3] *The Power of Delight: A Lifetime in Literature, Essays 1962-2002* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2005). As Margaret Drabble pointed out, John Bayley is quintessentially English in that he 'evades the contentions of theory by rejoicing in individual writers and by stressing the importance of details and events'.
[4] *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* (London: Duckworth, 1998).
[5] *The Romantic Survival: A Study in Poetic Evolution* (London: Constable, 1957). On the bestseller status of *The Sandcastle*, see the note to **A0391** in *Iris Murdoch: A Descriptive Primary and Annotated Secondary Bibliography* by John Fletcher and Cheryl Bove (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1994), p.85.

Such a critic may, he says, have been overcome by an excess of respect for a poem's 'ghostliness', but at least this made him or her aware that, like a human being, 'it had a life of its own which was ultimately mysterious and irreducible' (69). As against this, the modern critic is in danger of becoming so fascinated by the problems of analysis which the poem engenders that the concept of taste may be ignored altogether in favour of what Bayley calls the 'richly mediocre'. There is the concomitant hazard that poets will more or less consciously write for this kind of critic and exacerbate further our contemporary literary self-consciousness. 'The poetry analyst', Bayley concludes, 'is in danger of performing the same disservice for modern verse as the psychoanalyst has for the modern novel'.[6]

Even in this first study, then, Bayley was not afraid of sounding old-fashioned. He has continued, as a critic, to press a mildly-stated but strongly-felt individualism, and has not followed any particular school or tendency: he has not gone whoring after strange gods. This has had both advantages and drawbacks for his standing in the profession. He could not be more different, for instance, from the dauntingly theoretical Terry Eagleton, who by an odd irony succeeded him in the Warton chair, and who has long basked in the admiration of junior dons and PhD students. As Drabble points out in her review, Bayley finds Eagleton's austere preoccupation with literary theory 'worrying'. At his best, the less doctrinaire Bayley can be brilliantly perceptive; at less that his best he can sound merely prejudiced, even opinionated. He can be startlingly original; he can also, on occasion, be trite or dull.

Psychoanalysis, for instance, recurs as a *bête noire* in his next and most influential book, *The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality* (1960), where it is blamed for 'our lack of confidence in personality and our lack of respect for it'. The concept of personality – and a proper respect for it – is central to John Bayley's humanism, as it was indeed to the artistic enterprise of his late wife; on this they clearly thought as one. Bayley deeply regrets that the 'literary personality', by which he means character in the old-fashioned sense, 'has gone down in the world'. The writers whom he most fervently admires, Shakespeare and Tolstoy, are those who 'endow their characters with the greatest possible freedom to be themselves'. This is strongly reminiscent of Iris Murdoch's admonition in a well-known essay, published in the *Yale Review* shortly before her husband's second book came out, that 'a novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in'.[7]

The Characters of Love is a brilliant book that has stood the test of time very well. The sections on Henry James and Jane Austen, for instance, contain criticism of the highest order. The following remark is characteristic:

> With the power and breadth of curiosity which is one of the clearest signs of their genius, both James and Jane Austen feel their way into radically different kinds of consciousness, the good as well as the clever, the simple and instinctive as well as the vital and knowledgeable.[8]

[6] *The Romantic Survival*, pp.71-72.
[7] 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', *Yale Review*, 49 (December, 1959), pp. 247-71.
[8] *The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality* (London: Constable, 1960), pp. 214-215.

Bayley is so concerned about the rightness of his theme that he refuses to let the rather automatic pieties of academe interfere with its development. '*Ulysses*', he roundly asserts, 'is leaden with its own art, sunk in its richness like a great plum-cake […]. We can find more of the Shakespearean buoyancy in P.G. Wodehouse' (p. 285). The reader is left either to cheer or sneer, and I suppose each one will react differently. Personally I agree with that remark and find it both witty and astute. But this is because I think that *Ulysses* has been overrated by the Joyce industry, especially in the United States.

Bayley's greatest strength is his leisured, seemingly effortless writing style. He is just as effortlessly learned, too, being on terms of easy familiarity with the greatest authors of the past; and he is normally gifted with sure taste and sound values. To give an example of those qualities – not much esteemed in literary-critical circles now, unfortunately – his brief discussion of Wilfred Owen in *The Romantic Survival* is perfectly judged, and his conclusion – that, as a poet, Owen is 'intrinsically slight' – will certainly convince people (like myself) who admire Owen as a figure of myth, as the poignant representative of all those, commemorated on every war memorial, who 'shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old';[9] in other words, Owen the doomed soldier and not the *fabbro* of verse.

On the other hand, Bayley's weaknesses are a certain flaccid quality, a feeling of not being sufficiently taut or disciplined, and not ruthless enough towards irrelevance. The pace is sometimes rather slow, and the structure of the argument loose. These defects are least in evidence in *The Characters of Love*, but they do become perceptible later. *Tolstoy and the Novel* (1966)[10] is noticeably more wordy, and more repetitive of points made about other authors in the earlier books. But it is still worth reading for that characteristically Bayleyan quality, epigrammatic pithiness: for instance, his observation that it is no use trying to supply Isabel Archer with a sex-life which Henry James deliberately left out, 'because at moments of eating or making love there *is* no Isabel Archer – she does not exist' (60). It is a point I have often made when discussing *The Portrait of a Lady* with students: we realise that Isabel is unhappily married, not because she manifests sexual frustration as Lady Chatterley does – turning for solace to another man – but when she remains alone, staring into the fire, deep in thought, long after her husband, normally punctilious over social niceties, has, without wishing her goodnight, left the salon for his own room, where (James informs us) she is always expected to knock before gaining admittance.

Bayley reads Russian, and his next book was a commentary on Pushkin published in 1971 by Cambridge University Press in one of its modern languages series.[11] Probably the best study of Pushkin in English, it is a dazzling comparatist achievement with a breadth of literary reference that recalls Edmund Wilson's. He praises Pushkin for 'taking for granted the neutral existence of everything' and transcending any 'exclusive world of style'. For the reader without Russian, Bayley ably conveys what it is that makes Pushkin one of the world's greatest writers, qualities like versatility and concentration, and a kind of 'graven finality' which he shares with Horace.

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[9] Lines from the much-quoted poem by Laurence Binyon (1869-1943), 'For the Fallen'.
[10] *Tolstoy and the Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966). Some thirty years later, in a British Council series of popular monographs, he followed this up with a short, accessible introduction to the art of the Russian novelist (*Leo Tolstoy* [Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997]).
[11] *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

After *Pushkin*, Bayley published a collection of essays, *The Uses of Division* (1976),[12] and a book-length *Essay on Hardy* (1978).[13] His long-awaited study of Shakespeare's tragedies, first adumbrated in *The Characters of Love*, appeared in 1981.[14] Nine plays are examined, with a chapter devoted to each. The book was well received. Writing in the *New York Times* (18 August, 1981), Nona Balakian praised Bayley for arguing 'by example rather than abstract logic'; this enables him, she said, to derive 'his best insights […] from the interest he takes "in the way the play works"'. The first essay in the book is on *King Lear*, and it attracted particular praise from Kiernan Ryan for its 'critical finesse', for 'coming close […] to the source of the play's stylistic mystery'.[15]

Viewing the critical opus as a whole, one can see, as these reviewers did, that Bayley is a critic in the best belle-lettrist tradition of the nineteenth century, as exemplified by critics like Sainte-Beuve, George Saintsbury and A.C. Bradley: among the moderns he is closest, as I have implied, to Edmund Wilson. Like Wilson, he is eclectic, self-confident, and of impressive range. This is borne out in *The Power of Delight* which, in collecting the best of forty years of critical writing, includes essays on fictional universes as far apart as those of Anthony Powell and Boris Pasternak, and on such very different women as Angela Carter and Marina Tsvetaeva. Some of his acts of irreverence towards academic orthodoxies – such as the current fashion that restricts the syllabus to authors of mind-numbing obscurity like Thomas Pynchon, and to critical writing of soporific impenetrability like Derrida's – are refreshing, or would be if his were not a voice increasingly crying in the wilderness. And yet, in university libraries around the world, students are still borrowing his books, and over a hundred items are listed under his name on the Amazon website. In his own characteristically undemonstrative way, he has been just as influential as his predecessors, Lionel Trilling of Columbia and F.R. Leavis of Cambridge, and as his more flamboyant contemporaries, Frank Kermode, George Steiner and Christopher Ricks. He could not have written – would not wish to have written – such ambitious books as Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967) or Steiner's *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), or such elegantly-turned studies as Ricks's on Samuel Beckett (1990), but then they could not have written *The Characters of Love* or *Pushkin*.

Taken all in all, Bayley's particularly distinctive achievement has few rivals in the English-speaking world. Certainly no serious challenge is offered by the radical chic of an Ihab Hassan. As I wrote in 1982 – and it is a view that, nearly a quarter of a century later, I still hold – Bayley manages to be both radical *and* innocent at the same time, and (mercifully) quite immune to the blandishments of radical chic.

John Fletcher
University of Kent, 1982, 2006

[12] *The Uses of Division: Unity and Disharmony in Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976).
[13] *An Essay on Hardy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1978).
[14] *Shakespeare and Tragedy* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).
[15] Kiernan Ryan, '*King Lear*: A Retrospect, 1980-2000', in Peter Holland (ed.), *King Lear and its Afterlife* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.10-11.

Frances White describes the way Mary Midgley reveals her friendship with Iris Murdoch in her recent memoir, *The Owl of Minerva.* Her account is followed by a full-length review by John Clarke, which also explores Midgley's philosophical development follows.

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Murdoch and Midgley: The Owls of Minerva

'It is actually quite hard to pick a trail through the jungle of a life experience' (179), says Mary Midgley, but in her memoir, *The Owl of Minerva*, she succeeds in just so doing. Her account of her life as a philosopher trying to find her way through the darkness (hence the Hegelian title) offers a broad picture of the trends and developments in philosophy during the twentieth century in England, and is assessed in the following review by John Clarke. Midgley also assesses the contribution of the five women who were roughly contemporaneous at Oxford, and who rose to unusual prominence in the field: Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Mary Warnock, Mary Midgley herself and, of course, Iris Murdoch. Midgley suggests that these women philosophers achieved their pre-eminence because the war removed all male contemporaries other than the gentle spirits of 'conscientious objectors, disabled people and a few ordinands' (123) who did not silence female student voices as aggressive masculinity tends to.

The point is debatable, but it is as philosopher more than novelist that Midgley prizes Murdoch, and pays tribute to the originality and importance of *The Sovereignty of Good*. She admits, however, that apart from *Under the Net* and *The Bell*, which she finds 'profoundly humane and delightful' (183), she is unable to enjoy Murdoch's novels. Her criticisms (as well as being a philosopher, Midgley was a professional fiction reviewer for the *New Statesman* for many years) are that 'Iris never seemed to me to take her people quite seriously [...]' and that her repeated use of incestuous relationships 'break[s] up one pattern after another as it [is] forming'(183). By contrast, she praises Murdoch's philosophical work for showing 'the characteristic virtues of [Plato's] method – the systematic attention to the harmony of thought, feeling and imagination, the resolute refusal to let any one of these run away from the others', although she hedges her approval with the caveat that Murdoch also exhibits 'the drastic, black-and-white character of his morality' and is 'constitutionally open […] to demanding and accepting monistic solutions' (65-6), a stance to which Midgley's own more Aristotelian philosophy is antithetical.

The book provides a strong sense of Murdoch's personality from the perspective of a life-long friend who loved and valued her while still being able to acknowledge her imperfections. Midgley has dwelt particularly upon Murdoch because, despite understanding the reasons for and potential value of using 'a high-profile case like Iris's to break [the] taboo' on speaking openly about Alzheimer's (85), she is concerned that her friend's image has 'been distortingly concentrated on her last painful days' and feels that 'a word about her earlier life and thought seems needed to balance that emphasis' (85). And Midgley's well-chosen 'word' vividly evokes the vivaciously original, dazzlingly intelligent and lovable woman in danger of being lost behind Judi Dench's haunting portrayal of her decline.

Midgley and Murdoch met in October 1938 when they both went up to Somerville to study Greats, and they became instant friends; when Midgley married in 1950 it was Murdoch she chose for her bridesmaid. As well as studying together (both were pupils of Edward Fraenkel and Donald MacKinnon) the two young women holidayed in France and Midgley adds to the store of anecdotage about Murdoch:

> We […] went to a fair – I think in Montmartre. Here they had that quite new marvel the Rotor – a large drum in which you could stand against the wall and become gradually stuck to it by centrifugal force as the thing spun round at increasing speed [… .] Citizens who were brave enough to do this didn't have to pay – it was the spectators in the little gallery above, watching and no doubt hoping for a disaster, who paid. Iris, quite typically, volunteered at once to be rotated. (151)

It seems surprising that this dramatic experience was never bequeathed to any of Murdoch's fictional characters. Perhaps, for the better understanding of one of Murdoch's fictional obsessions, the single most telling piece of 'inside information' which Midgley shares is that 'incest in particular appeared to have a special significance for her. I remember that once, when I mentioned my brother, she said, "Oh I do wish I'd had a brother. I'd have had a tremendous incestuous affair with him". I wanted to say, "But that's not how it mostly works […]". But there was a dream there that my comments couldn't reach' (183). This exchange provides a background to many 'Murdochian' relationships such as that between Honor Klein and Palmer Anderson in *A Severed Head*.

Midgley provides a vignette that tallies well with portraits of Murdoch by John Bayley, Peter Conradi and Mary Warnock.[1]

> In our first days at Oxford she did stand out among us because she was exceptionally relaxed and easy to know. This was largely, I think, because she was far less self-conscious, less frightened of making a wrong impression, than most of us, so one could get to know her more easily. Iris was always much less interested than people generally are in wondering what others would think of her, and this was a central reason why these others in fact liked her so much. She was never beautiful but always attractive, in those days looking rather like an art student, with a blond fringe – blonder than it became later – and slightly dirndl-ish clothes, but this effect was fresh and not at all excessive [...] Middle-sized, lively, with a slightly buxom Irish figure and a bouncy, swinging walk, she was altogether a cheerful and encouraging element in a confusing scene. (86)

She also corroborates A.N.Wilson's assertion that Murdoch could be uncharacteristically touchy

[1] See *Iris* and *Iris and the Friends* by John Bayley (London: Duckworth, 1999) and *Mary Warnock: A Memoir: People and Places* (London: Duckworth, 2002), and *Iris Murdoch: A Life* by Peter J.Conradi (London: HarperCollins, 2001).

concerning Northern Irish matters;[2] Midgley's criticism of Ian Paisley threatened to endanger their long friendship (147). Yet the overall impression of Murdoch created in this book is of an insouciant charm mixed with a single-minded dedication to the writing she saw as her life's purpose, to which friendship, however important, came a definite second (147).

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John Clarke: Review of Mary Midgley: *The Owl of Minerva: A Memoir*, (Routledge: London and New York, 2005). ISBN 0-415-36788-3 (HB)

The title of this book is a bold choice. It comes from one of the few memorable statements made by Hegel: 'The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk'. Mary Midgley interprets this to mean that 'wisdom, and therefore philosophy, comes into its own when things become dark and difficult rather than when they are clear and straightforward'. She could have added that it is also often taken to mean that wisdom comes late, when conflicting yet mind-maturing experiences come to a kind of fullness which brings both a comprehensive vision of life and an inner serenity. This certainly is the feeling that the reader attains at the end of this remarkable memoir.

Of the two major threads that weave their way through this book – on the one hand Midgley's relationship with friends and family and, on the other, her career as a philosopher – it is the former which occupies the great majority of its pages. The sense of a close life-long bonding with friends is indeed a recurring motif, and repeatedly throughout this book we learn of yet another new acquaintance who has become a firm and close friend.

Mary Midgley's friendship with Iris Murdoch was of particular importance to her, and is in some ways a key to the latter's whole life, which can be seen as a kind of dialectic between her personal and her professional life. They met at Oxford where they studied together along with several other subsequently eminent women intellectuals, including Philippa Foot, Mary Warnock and Elizabeth Anscombe. Midgley writes that Iris was one of the first people she met on going up to Somerville College in 1938, and she reveals, 'I liked her at once and she quickly became one of my closest friends; she remained so throughout our lives'. She describes Iris at the time of their early friendship as 'exceptionally relaxed and easy to know', uninhibited in giving voice to her opinions. Physically she was not beautiful in Midgley's eyes, but 'with a buxom Irish figure and a bouncy walk, she was altogether a cheerful and encouraging element in a confusing scene'.

This strong sense of human bonding is even more evident in Midgley's relationship with her family. Much of the early part of this book is devoted to detailed and affectionate accounts of her parents and grandparents. A whole chapter is devoted to tracing back her ancestry to one Sir Thomas Urquhart. She tells that, living in the early seventeenth century, he was one of the first to propound the

[2] See *Iris Murdoch as I knew Her* by A.N.Wilson (London: Hutchinson, 2003).

idea of a universal language but, after coming into near fatal conflict with the Parliamentarians in the Civil War, he died in a fit of laughter on the news of King Charles's restoration.

Her observations concerning the many characters, family and otherwise, that pass through her life are fascinating and give us a glimpse of life for a reasonably comfortably-off family in the first half of the last century. We are entertained by an amusing portrait of her life as a boarder at Downe House, a semi-progressive boarding school which employed a bevy of somewhat eccentric teachers such as the maths mistress who 'usually much preferred to talk about something else'. In the account of her subsequent life we meet along the way the great classicist Gilbert Murray, for whom she worked as an assistant shortly after graduating, and his daunting, eccentric wife, Lady Mary, who 'combined fiercely progressive and high-minded opinions with the serene and total confidence of the aristocrat whom nobody ever opposes'. She tells us of the encouragement she gained in her philosophical development from such people as Gilbert Ryle, E.R.Dodds, and Isobel Henderson. And the accounts of her brief lectureship in philosophy at Reading and her much longer one at Newcastle are enlivened with affectionate and entertaining portraits of colleagues such as Herbert Hodges, who 'regarded the whole of linguistic philosophy as simply a mistake, and John Findlay, 'a campaigning atheist – so vehement a fighter that he could scarcely admit that Thomas Aquinas was a philosopher at all'.

Her warmest words, though, are reserved for her husband Geoff, whom she married in 1950 (Iris was the bridesmaid – a difficult image to entertain). For most of their nearly fifty years of marriage he was a lecturer in philosophy at Newcastle University, and she speaks highly of his achievements there. A number of very complimentary obituaries are cited, and she makes much of his old-fashioned dedication to the needs of his students and to the importance of teaching, a now regrettably unfashionable approach which she fully shared with him.

Yet there is at the same time a certain ambivalence about her relationships, certainly with members of her family. One gets the sense at times of an overbearing stuffiness in some of her early relationships, such as that with her father, of a lack of warmth and emotional depth. And there emerges a generational gap, which she dwells on in general as well as personal terms, and the sense of a need to emancipate herself, to discover and pursue her own way. Thus, her early philosophical stirrings as a teenager seem to have arisen, not out of any pubescent agonising over the meaning of life in general, but rather out of the need to construct her own way of being.

This need enjoyed its early fulfilment at Oxford where, after a brief and traumatic stay in Vienna at the time of the Nazi *Anschluss,* she chose to read Mods and Greats, a course which was centred on the study of the classics. This was a subject for which Downe House School had ill-prepared her and which required her to undertake much irksome supplementary study in a field dominated by pedantic and, in her eyes, rather pointless pedagogic practices. The philosophy component of her studies, however, gave her and her new friends much intellectual excitement, and it is clear that the atmosphere as well as the content of this part of her studies were crucial in shaping her subsequent career and her distinctive ways of thinking.

Iris Murdoch certainly played an important role in the early development of Midgley's thinking, but the latter makes it clear that their intellectual formation showed early signs of divergence at this stage. This divergence is evident in their different attitudes towards Plato, who was of course a

key figure in their studies. For Murdoch, Plato was clearly the most important seminal thinker, not only with regard to the idealism at the heart of Platonic philosophy, but also to what Midgley calls 'the systematic attention to the harmony of thought, feeling and imagination', and to 'the relatively drastic, black and white character of his morality'. This feature, she suggests, was related to Murdoch's early strong attachment to the communist party with its uncompromising intellectual stance and discipline.

For Midgley, however, it was Aristotle, with his anti-dualistic stance and his sense of being-in-the-world rather than straining to go beyond it, who was important to her, as was his focus on biology and the world of nature. This factor was especially significant for her later writings about evolution and human nature. And while she was certainly drawn to socialism, and remained staunchly on the political left throughout her life, her more radical instincts were tempered by knowledge of the cruel realities of the Soviet Union. She points out that many intellectuals at that time were fascinated by communism and the hope it held up for radical change towards a better world, but that many became disenchanted by stories of Russian atrocities that emerged in the 30s and 40s. One of these was Murdoch, who became disenchanted somewhat later than Midgley but who, much to the latter's dismay, later 'completed her political odyssey across the political spectrum by supporting and voting for Margaret Thatcher'. This discovery led to something of a chill in their relationship, but does not appear in the long run to have altered the warmth of their regard for each other.

Another possible point of friction between them, but one which likewise does not seem to have been terminal for their relationship, is the fact that Mary did not greatly appreciate Iris's fictional writings. We do not learn whether Iris was apprised of this, but Midgley admits that, in spite of liking several of her novels including *Under the Net* and *The Bell*, she was 'not able to enjoy most of Iris Murdoch's novels'. She comments that 'after *The Bell*, Iris never seemed to me to take her people quite seriously [….] My impression was that she was somehow looking down from above at their struggles and repeatedly lobbing down bizarre challenges, just to see what they would do'. It is only fair to note, however, that after enjoying a long stint of novel reading of all kinds, she became later in life somewhat sated with fiction in general, and shifted her non-professional reading interests towards 'true stories – biographies and memoirs'.

Turning now to the second major strand of the memoir, Midgley's philosophical development, her aversion to the more doctrinaire forms of socialism which we have just noted was a manifestation of one of the most characteristic features of her thinking as it began to emerge in these early years at Oxford, namely a tendency towards pluralism. This involved a recognition of the need to take account of a wide diversity of points of view rather than seeking to force them into a single coherent system or general overarching theory. By contrast with the Cartesian rationalist tradition, she saw little profit in the pursuit of infallible certainty or systematic completion.

In many ways this openness to diversity and refusal to listen to the sirens of intellectual totality place her firmly in the British empiricist tradition manifested most obviously in the figures of Locke and Mill. At its best, she argues, empiricists discourage the general habit of dogmatising, and help to 'bring out the actual complexity of life [and] resist the crude, oversimplified doctrines that continually narrow our options as we try to impose order on the foaming chaos around us'.

Nevertheless, she reserves some of her sharpest strictures for certain modern empiricists, in particular Bertrand Russell and A.J. Ayer, who in her view transformed empiricism into a dangerous dogma. This dogma, identifiable broadly as logical positivism, is based on the principle that our understanding of the world can only make sense in so far as it is empirically verifiable, which in the final analysis means that 'the vast range of intelligible human speech [must be] squeezed into the bounds of science'. She describes it as a kind of 'weed-killer' which prevents the spread of any ideas that go beyond direct experience, and encourages a narrow philosophical practice which confronts inconvenient doctrines, such as those of religion, with the response, 'I simply don't understand that'. Amongst other things, this approach disastrously underestimates, she thinks, the personal standpoint of the philosopher him/herself, and, as with Russell, assumes that philosophy is capable of a completely impersonal impartiality.

She notes that the influence of the positivism of Russell and Ayer diminished considerably in post World War Two Oxford philosophy, and that new horizons were opening up, for example, in ethics and the philosophy of mind. Nevertheless, she laments that the philosophers of the so-called linguistic analysis tradition continued to view their task in a narrowly paranoid way which feared to venture ambitious ideas that might be criticised as vague or credulous. She is particularly critical of the anti-historical tendency in linguistic philosophy, and delivers a powerful broadside against Ted Honderich for voicing the (typical) view that philosophy should be more like science, 'which left at least most of its past in museums'. By contrast, Midgley believed that the historical background and context of thought is essential for adequate understanding.

This historical perspective is linked to her heroic attempts to break out from the narrow specialisation which, she argues, is a characteristic feature, not only of modern philosophy, but of academia in general. Unfashionably, she committed herself in both her teaching and writing to an interdisciplinary approach which she believed is necessary if philosophy is to stay close to creative and imaginative life, and to have relevance to the wider world of human experience.

Her openness to difference and to a comprehensive approach to problems led her to an interest, also unfashionable amongst linguistic philosophers in her time, in science, a subject in which she had no formal training. She was especially concerned with the importance of the biological and ethological approaches to the question of human nature. This comes out strongly in her first important book, *Beast and Man*, and in many of her subsequent writings. Yet at the same time she frequently voices her concern about the dangers of permitting science itself to become a new tyrannical dogma. Her recent attacks on the scientism of Richard Dawkins are a case in point, though unfortunately her memoir makes no mention of this episode.

The rôle of science in modern life was only one of the many topics that are addressed in the burgeoning published output of her later years and, as a distinguished public intellectual and polemicist, Midgley has been caught up in many of the great disputes of our times. One of her most recent publications, for example, is a pamphlet on the Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock. In this she displays not only the richness of her holistic outlook, and her willingness to court controversy, but also her continuing concern to practice philosophy in its more traditional sense, and to place it once again in the public forum. On the final page of this memoir she assures us that, at well over eighty years of age, she

now lives peacefully, 'without anything very startling to report'. Fortunately, however, the voice of this wise old owl remains as powerful and indispensable as ever.

John Clarke

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Barbara Heusel: Review of Sexuality, Gender and Power in Iris Murdoch's Fiction by Tammy Grimshaw (Associated University Presses, 2005), ISBN: 0838640613

Tammy Grimshaw's *Sexuality, Gender and Power in Iris Murdoch's Fiction* adds substantial information to Murdoch studies.[3] In her introduction she recounts gaps in Murdoch scholarship that she has most carefully culled from books of criticism written by perhaps the most influential of Murdoch critics. For example, she seems to be most influenced in her choice of subject matter by Elizabeth Dipple's preface to *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit*. Dipple states 'the book that should be written' next should focus on 'political connotations and the wide-ranging subtlety of [Murdoch's] treatment of sex in its association with social secrecy, lying and contemporary violence'.[4] This is the space Grimshaw has carved out for herself in Murdoch criticism by surveying what has been ignored, and accepting the task of filling that space. In so doing, she performs a service for all of Murdoch's readers. Furthermore, she prepares the reader for her subject in the first paragraph when she takes seriously a comment from Peter Conradi's *Iris Murdoch: A Life*: 'Critics of Murdoch's fiction have often failed to see that the theme of power was a deep obsession in her work' (17). She appropriates this most salient point, and it becomes the basis of Part II of her text, entitled 'Knowledge, Power and the Subject: Foucauldian Readings'.

Grimshaw broadens her introduction to include dialogues with scholars who come from a more recent group of Murdoch critics, such as Angela Hague, Cheryl Bove, Deborah Johnson, Barbara Heusel and Maria Antonaccio. Grimshaw spars with some of these critics who have stated feminist opinions about Murdoch's place in the feminist movement, agreeing or disagreeing and building on their work as she looks for space to add new information or a new critical view. Such a process leads her closer to her subject and to the recent work of Judith Butler, W.S.Hampl and Bran Nicol, who emphasize the subjects of sexuality, same-sex partners, and queer studies. In this way Grimshaw establishes solidly her position in relation to the work that has preceded her.

The stated goal of this book is to explore Murdoch's immersion in philosophy, morality, individual autonomy and freedom of choice in order to focus on 'the overlooked theme of power in Murdoch's fiction, particularly the interplay of power, gender and sexuality in her characters' personal

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[3]Grimshaw's acknowledgements in her book refer to my being her thesis director when she was a master's student at Northwest Missouri State University.

[4] Elizabeth Dipple, *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982), p.xi.

and social relationships' (17). Grimshaw argues that Platonism is a key element in Murdoch's understanding of sexuality, and the Platonic construct of Eros is at the foundation of her philosophical thought about gender freedom. As a Platonist, Murdoch argued that spirituality and sexuality (Eros or life force) are integrally connected, and that low Eros (selfish, egoistic behaviour) can be transformed by moral vision. In the light of Murdoch's view, Grimshaw establishes the scope of the author's use of Eros and foregrounds her aesthetic requirements, discussing the development of several characters who are not heterosexual.

Particular discussions that I find innovative and exciting are her analyses of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and of Plato's charioteer's myth in the *Phaedrus* and the *androgynes* myth in the *Symposium*. Helpful to Murdoch critics are the scholarly sources Grimshaw has used and, especially, her cogent explanation of the way in which Freud misappropriated the *androgynes* myth to heterosexuality, distorting it for subsequent students of sexuality. Freud ignored Plato's description of three genders who are torn apart and left to search for their other halves, two genders being homosexual (173). Such a distortion has long since become the source of a Modernist misinterpretation of texts, for example Yeats's Ledaean egg in 'Among School Children', to say nothing of the confusion it causes in D.H. Lawrence's reference to androgynous love in *Women in Love*. Grimshaw's explication of this myth, as Murdoch read it in the original, demonstrates that we must dismiss some of the erroneous annotations in Norton Anthologies. Grimshaw's book reminds us that much of the analysis of sexuality in Murdoch's novels depends on getting the Greek right!

Because her text has a feminist bent, Grimshaw begins her discussion at the start of the second wave of feminism by employing Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* to analyze Murdoch's exploration of sexuality. She argues that Murdoch believed that freedom and love are necessary to the pursuit of goodness, and understood that the vulnerable human being must struggle against a natural desire for power. In other words, since power and goodness are antithetical, Grimshaw furnishes historical background on the Gay and Women's Liberation Movements that is helpful in analyzing Murdoch's evolving stances toward both these movements. In Part II, she addresses Murdoch's theme of powerlessness, examining relationships between sexual partners such as Michael Mead and Nick Fawley in *The Bell*; Simon Foster and Axel Nilsson in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*; Palmer Anderson and Honor Klein in *A Severed Head* and Carel and Elizabeth Fisher in *The Time of the Angels*. In Part III, she examines representations of bisexuality and transvestism in the relationships of Cato Forbes and Beautiful Joe in *Henry and Cato*; Tamar Hernshaw and Duncan Cambus in *The Book and the Brotherhood*; Tom McCaffrey and Emmanuel (a/k/a Emma) Scarlett-Taylor in *The Philosopher's Pupil*; Harvey Blackett and Tessa Millen in *The Green Knight* and Bradley Pearson and Julian Baffin in *The Black Prince.*

Grimshaw sets herself a challenging research goal: to analyze some of Murdoch's characters whom she classifies as homosexuals, bisexuals, and/or transvestites. By applying the author's moral philosophy to the behaviour of the characters listed above, she is able to use Murdoch's non-fiction to reveal the novelist's understanding that 'the beauty of a sexual partner can be a path to the good' (180). She quotes *The Fire and the Sun*: '"metaphysical enlightenment" is achieved through the "proper apprehension of beauty" which leads to the "joy in reality through transfiguring of desire"' (181).

Other new ground in Grimshaw's text is her complex discussion of Diotima's mythical ladder in the *Symposium* as a vehicle for reaching goodness. She accomplishes two tasks here: she shows, by quoting Kenneth Dover's *Greek Homosexuality,* Diotima's view that one 'has an obligation to one's beloved "at whatever cost in agony to oneself"' (182), and also shows that in *The Book and the Brotherhood* Tamar Hernshaw's romantic love of both the ugly and already-married Duncan and his wife, Jean, is unselfish because Tamar suffers an unhappy pregnancy for the benefit of these two loves. By revealing the way Murdoch has ironically substituted Tamar's pregnant body and unwanted pregnancy for the myth's male body, which gives birth to reason, Grimshaw establishes the author's brilliance. Quoting statements about the *Symposium* from *The Fire and the Sun* and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Grimshaw concludes that Murdoch 'indicates that she desired to deploy Plato's doctrines in [a] genderless and inclusive manner' (184).

Readers will relish the fun of tracing alongside Grimshaw the intricate patterns that Murdoch creates for her characters, giving the reader the joy of discovering, as Grimshaw does, that the various categories established at the beginning of the text to discuss characters who are not strictly heterosexual, do not exactly apply. Characteristically, Murdoch ends her performances in ambiguity.

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In this and in future editions, *The Iris Murdoch News Letter* will feature one article on material in the Oxford Archive at the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies, one article on the material in the Conradi Archive and, when possible, one on a recent acquisition by the Centre. Contributions from researchers are invited and will be considered for publication in the News Letter.

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On Iris Murdoch's Pen-friendships

Iris Murdoch spent up to four hours a day writing letters. You could say that pen-friendship offered her cost-free intimacy, a point of entry into the imaginative worlds of others, and a stage on which to try out her own *personae*. Her first, with James Henderson Scott in 1937-8, began a series. Frank Thompson replaced Scott as distant love-object from 1941-44, David Hicks replaced Frank from 1944 to 1946[1], Raymond Queneau replaced Hicks from 1946 to 1956. By 1985, she had many pen-pals, most of whom were also fans.

[1] Her brief 1946 engagement to Hicks after a seven year correspondence shows that this writing had power-in-the-world, was not mere 'fantasy'.

The letter-runs in the Kingston University archives are the tip of the iceberg. I have read hundreds of letters in each of the runs to David Hicks, Raymond Queneau, Stephen Gardiner, Rachel Fenner, David Morgan, Hal Lidderdale, Leo Pliatzky, Harry Weinberger, Marjorie Boulton, few of these represented at Kingston. She also corresponded voluminously with Honor Tracey, David Luke, Rosemary Verey, Betty Hester, Roly Cochrane, numerous pen-pals in continental Europe, Canetti, A.S.Byatt, Andrew Harvey, Brigid Brophy, Stuart Hampshire (destroyed), Marjorie Locke (destroyed), and probably many more.

Just contemplating the scale of this enterprise leaves one gasping. Murdoch resembles in her letter-runs Hannah Crean-Smith, imprisoned within the tower-of-art, but reaching out to the world's lonely to offer the solace of knowing they are thought of. That Murdoch was herself consoled too, of course, by these exchanges does not lessen one's awe. It is increased when one recalls that this vicarious life-through-letters was never the whole of her existence: leaving aside the labour of writing 26 novels, she lived, fully, in the flesh, too, in a busy social life that had its own ardent satisfactions and challenges.

The first two articles that begin the series of commentaries on archive material in the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies deal with two letter-runs. First, Anne Rowe examines the letters from Iris Murdoch to Lucy Klatschko (who later became Sister Marian at Stanbrook Abbey) alongside Sister Marian's letters to myself and John Bayley. The second article records my own observations on a letter-run from Iris Murdoch to Roly Cochrane, a teacher and writer, which was acquired by the Centre in October 2005.

Peter Conradi
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'Thou Art the Journey': The Sister Marian Letters

The Conradi archive at the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies contains a run of 21 letters from Iris Murdoch to Lucy Klatschko (who later became Sister Marian, a Benedictine nun at Stanbrook Abbey, midway between Malvern and Worcester). The archive also holds one letter from Sister Marian to Murdoch, sixteen letters to Peter Conradi and two to John Bayley. The women's friendship spanned some forty years and, after their time together at Somerville, was conducted almost wholly through their correspondence. John Bayley remembers Iris meeting Lucy at least twice, once on her own before their marriage in 1956, and once after it with John, when at Murdoch's request he waited in the car in the car-park while Murdoch and Sister Marian talked.[1] The letters record one other meeting in the February of either 1987 or 1988, when their mutual friend, Honor Tracy, was dying. Sister Marian

[1] Peter Conradi, e-mail correspondence, 16 August 2006. Professor Conradi has kindly provided a great deal of information about Lucy Klatschko for this essay. All quotations from my conversations with him, from his emails and from other sources are referenced PC in brackets. I am also indebted to Professor Conradi for his help with dating Murdoch's letters to Sister Marian, and for his comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

herself wrote to Peter Conradi that they 'only met at long intervals – briefly. But I always felt her great warmth'.[2] Despite their meeting so rarely, the existing letters pay testament to a deep emotional bond, and suggest that sustaining contact, however tenuous, was an emotional imperative for both women.[3]

The only archived letter from Sister Marian to Murdoch explains a card she had sent to Iris, with the words, 'thou art the journey', written on it: 'I meant to explain about the card I sent you – "thou art the journey" – but was in a hurry – also I have the age old habit of assuming that my friends know how I arrived at a conclusion without my telling them – so that was after a Community meeting at which each one had to say briefly how she saw her own vocation and it all added up to "thou art the journey"'.[4] Their antithetical life-choices meant that each woman was an enduring source of fascination to the other – they were, in some sense, 'doubles' – each making a pilgrimage from what Conradi describes as 'wildness, bohemianism and promiscuity' towards their own individual visions of holiness. If, as Conradi has suggested, Sister Marian may have been 'someone through contemplation of whose life Murdoch could make sense of her own personal pilgrimage', the same might also be said about Iris's role in Sister Marian's life. With such similar beginnings in intellectual and emotional terms, each could, *mutatis mutandis*, have so easily chosen the other's path**,** and meditating on the progress of the other was, in a sense, charting the journey of their alter-ego.

Their friendship is recorded in Conradi's biography and briefly in John Bayley's memoir, *Iris*. Klatschko was ahead of Murdoch at Somerville (she was there from 1936-39 and they overlapped by one year);[5] Conradi describes her as a 'quiet, fey and very beautiful half-Latvian and Jewish senior scholar reading Modern Languages'.[6] Lucy belonged to an earlier generation that had gone up in 1936 and who Murdoch admired for 'the courageous way they dealt with men, for their Communism, and their willingness to explore same-sex liaisons' (PC). John Bayley has identified Lucy as the student to whom he refers as 'being helped by a boyfriend back over the college wall'.[7] To Conradi Lucy revealed that 'the reference to my climbing over the wall is quite correct, in fact I remember doing this quite often – there was an easy place'.[8] Murdoch was taken with this 'quiet but wild and adorable' and 'particularly glamorous' woman (Conradi 202), perhaps because of the lack of confidence she herself experienced on going up to Somerville. In a letter to David Hicks Murdoch described herself as 'tongue-tied and unsure of herself and frightened of everyone' (Conradi 202).[9]

In the light of even these brief vignettes, Lucy Klatschko's decision to become a postulant at Stanbrook in 1954 is an enigma. Conradi provides an indication of how such a decision came to be

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[2] Letter to Conradi, 2 January, 1998. When available I have given exact dates for these letters; some, however, are dated only by month and not by the precise day. In interviews held in the Conradi archive Sister Marian may be recalled by Carol and Frances Graham-Harrison, by George and Alastine Lehman and by John and Anne Willett (PC).

[3] The letters from Sister Marian to Murdoch no longer exist. Murdoch destroyed nearly all correspondence as a matter of routine.

[4] This letter also reveals that Sister Marian was glad to have sent Iris's letters into the care of Peter Conradi as she could not bear to throw them away.

[5] Sister Marian, letter to Conradi, 9 January, 1998.

[6] Peter Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 82-3. All further page numbers refer to this edition.

[7] Quoted in Conradi, p.83. See also John Bayley, *Iris: A Memoir* (London: Duckworth, 1998).

[8] Letter dated 6 December, 1998.

[9] Lucy crops up in two of Murdoch's war-time letters to David Hicks: 'Lucy has vanished', Murdoch wrote in April 1942, but in February 1945 she reappeared. Murdoch ran into Lucy in Charing Cross Road, looking dejected, working 'in some government department'; they planned to meet again soon (PC).

made when he describes how, in the foggy December of 1952, Iris and Lucy met for lunch. In general Lucy found communication with Iris 'easy and delightful', but that day Iris was greatly upset that a friend of hers had just died - 'a Jewish refugee who was a brilliant poet' - and this meeting between the two friends was 'memorably different - the meal was silent and strained'. The strain may not have been entirely one-sided: Lucy was working at the time for Thomas Thorpe, a bookseller on Albermarle Street, a 'horrible man' who secretly pinched the behinds of the girl assistants. 'She consoled herself by reading as many books against the Catholic Church as she could find, only to discover, to her horrified and dismayed interest, that she was gradually becoming persuaded by the power of that which was being attacked' (Conradi 344).

Sister Marian's letters to Conradi reveal another reason for her radical life-change: she had made a friend in her previous Civil Service job and would walk with her to a flat in Kensington where she lived with her mother, who had been left a widow at 33 years old with six children. The family was financially deprived, and Lucy was struck by their lack of many of the things she took for granted: 'I was impressed by the old lady. She was always sitting peacefully saying her rosary or reading her prayer book [. . .] She showed no sign of bitterness so that was why I became interested in Catholicism and read all the books I could find against it. But discovered the power they were against'.[10] Neither reason is in itself adequate to have generated such a profound change of direction, and could only have contributed to it. Klatschko would certainly have undergone a serious and possibly tortuous path of self-reflection and questioning before finally, just before Christmas 1952, being received into the Church, and on 1 May 1954 being accepted at Stanbrook Abbey as a postulant.

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'May it be all that you hope, and more that cannot be imagined beforehand. Take me with you as much as you can', wrote Murdoch to Lucy on her entry into Stanbrook.[11] The letter accompanied a gift and was signed with 'concern' as well as affection. A second letter written at the same time says 'I will indeed, indeed think of you there and do whatever unbelievers count as praying'.

Conradi explains that, as Klatschko was not a virgin, she was given a special Stanbrook position that may have been called 'external sister'. She was required to deal with the outside world, perhaps with visitors, shopping and driving when these were necessary. In July 1954, Iris went to Stanbrook to visit Lucy, who was now 'Sister Marian', and recorded their meeting in her journal:

> Dressed in her own clothes, black & white & a veil & a black cloak she looked like someone acting in a play as a nun. In the chapel in the morning I identified her, among several black-clad figures with their backs to me, by her black gym shoes. Then she extinguished the candles on the altar. It was like being in a play.
>
> Later we went for a walk, & we lay down in a hayfield. L. said she wanted to roll on the grass and did so. (It was a secluded field).
>
> She asked if I had cigarettes. Fortunately I had - & she smoked one in a lonely lane, leaning against a gate & looking airily up & down to see if anyone was coming. It was all

[10] Letter to Conradi, 26 May 1999.

[11] This undated letter was written from St Anne's, which identifies it as written before 1963. Conradi notes that 'it was common for Iris to write twice on important occasions' and suggests that both letters may have been written to mark Lucy's acceptance into the convent in 1954 or at a later date when she had finished her 'probationary' period there, which takes about six years. In this case these letters would have been written around 1960.

> gloriously improper & very strange. She said that for the first month she wept continuously, her tears falling on to the altar rails & into the soup. No, she said, she could not leave. She asked me how she looked. Whether she looked like a nun – as there were no mirrors in the Abbey. (No mirrors.) I was moved to see her, sad to leave her.[12]

Honor Tracy wrote to Sister Marian that Iris 'was always against your leaving the world, though not against [the] *idea* as *such*' – so like Iris! [. . .] what a curious mixture she is of arrogance – for who is she, or anyone, to approve or not? – and warm understanding and sympathy. But she loves you very much and is always asking about you'.[13] Sister Marian's enclosed life was always to be a source of attraction for Iris. She wrote in her journal on 12 January 1994: 'Lucy's life – to imagine it . . .'. [14] 'I think it was my conversion that caused Iris to take so much interest', Sister Marian suggested to Conradi.[15]

This fascination found its way into the novels, and Sister Marian herself assumed that *The Bell*, published in 1958, drew on Stanbrook: 'I thought the setting for *The Bell* was here – everything fitted except the location of the cemetery'.[16] Conradi suggests that Sister Marian might have suggested the figure of the reluctant postulant, Catherine Fawley, but points out that, unlike Catherine, she was to be happy in convent life for fifty years. Sister Marian's letters to Conradi record some tension between the women regarding the sexual entanglements in Murdoch's novels: she thought Iris 'a Saint in her own way, only obscured by the brilliance of her own mind' and reveals that she and Iris had a 'certain contretemps' after she had read one of the novels after *The Bell*.[17] She complained to Iris that 'the sex imbroglios of her novels reduced the characters, made them unreal and would be bad for people' – meaning the nuns whom she felt needed protection.[18] 'On the whole', she says, '[I] felt that they were spoilt by the experimental sex relationships which made the characters unreal'. Sister Marian was aware that Iris was annoyed, and remembers that she responded by suggesting that her 'more discerning characters would understand' (to which Sister Marian adds, 'but then most of her readers

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[12] Quoted in Conradi, p.420.

[13] Ibid., p.421. The Conradi archive also contains 9 letters from Honor Tracey to Sister Marian. Conradi describes Honor as 'a fine comic writer [. . .] a big jolly woman with rubicund and porcine features [who] wore her flaming Anglo-Norman red hair somewhere between *en brosse* and beehive [. . . .] [She] had an occasionally combative manner and appeared to be one (mainly) for the ladies' (p.22). Honor often verges on being unkind about Iris and is frequently critical of Iris's novels: 'She's so very famous – for all the wrong reasons'; 'as to her books, they do seem alas a waste of her wonderful gifts'; 'the dear creature hasn't a qualm about her depraved writings!' In a letter to Conradi Sister Marian said that she feared Iris might be hurt by Honor's letters, though 'not by anything in particular but by the fact of being written about objectively' (letter dated 6 December, 1998).

[14] Conradi, p.344.

[15] Letter to Conradi, January 1999.

[16] Letter to Conradi, 27 February 1998. Sister Marian also wrote that 'the cemetery scene in *The Bell* showed that [Iris] understood the purpose of the enclosure: to keep distractions out and so give freedom at deeper levels' (letter to Conradi, 9 January 1998). Sister Marian was wrong, however, in her assumption – the descriptions of Imber Abbey in *The Bell* were in fact taken from Malling Abbey in Kent, which Murdoch visited between 3 and 9 October 1946, 6-7 August 1948 and 2-4 August 1949. See Conradi pp.247-48. Conradi also notes that Murdoch 'invented a character surnamed (improbably) Datschko in her unpublished *Jerusalem* novel (1958)'.

[17] Letter to Conradi, 9 January 1998. Sister Marian liked other aspects of the novels: In the same letter she remembers excitedly: '[A] brilliant anti-climax scene that I loved [. . .] in a later novel where a little refugee dressmaker had been set up as a home-worker by the central character and she was in a continual state of apprehension thinking that he intended to seduce her and so planned to escape and hid her maps of Australia when he came to visit her'.

[18] In the same letter to Conradi Sister Marian also complains that in *The Bell* (though Sister Marian had forgotten the title) the characters 'genuflect to the abbess which is never done – on the other hand there is a very true insight when two of the visitors climb into the enclosure and find themselves in the cemetery where the two nuns are tending the graves – and one of these opens the unlocked gates to let them out' (letter, 2 January 1998).

were not discerning').[19] Conradi speculates that, as a result of Sister Marian's views, Murdoch may have 'created a character called Marian in *The Unicorn* who suffers from too much innocence' (423).

If Murdoch thought Sister Marian too 'innocent', she was proven right. Sister Marian's letters to Conradi reveal that she thought Murdoch was 'very perceptive but at the same time unrealistic',[20] and believed that most of her life was lived in her head: 'I still cannot get over the idea of Iris's actually having affairs', she writes, 'I had always assumed they were imaginary[21] [. . .] that her obsession with sex in her novels was due to a lack of it in her life'.[22] Perhaps this misconception resulted from Murdoch's gift for 'soliciting the experiences of others without communicating her own', which Sister Marian had also noted.[23] 'Looking back', she said, 'I realise Iris was very reserved about herself'.[24]

A particular type of quiet, but emotionally voracious, woman, like the young Lucy Klatschko (and Iris Murdoch herself), is, as Conradi observes, recurrent in Murdoch's novels.[25] The sequence comes to an end, he notes, in 1980, with Anne Cavidge in *Nuns and Soldiers*, who seems to owe something to Klatschko. Conradi understands Anne Cavidge, in fact, to be an imaginative fusion of Iris's own imaginings about Lucy, and of Iris herself: in *Nuns and Soldiers* Murdoch describes Anne's youth to have been

> a carnival, a maelstrom, a festival of popularity and personality and sex. She obtained a First [. . .] [while simultaneously devoting] energy, thought and feeling to love affairs. There were so many jostling men [. . .] dazzling choices [. . .] flattering vistas. She became skilful at conducting two, even three, affairs at the same time keeping the victims happy by lying.

But like both Klatschko and Murdoch, Anne is also attracted by 'the idea of holiness, of becoming good in some positive sense' and does not 'judge her sins therein too harshly indulging no morbid sense of guilt: Everything was provisional and moved so fast; others behaved quite as wildly as she'; moreover her early life had been in itself 'a teaching, something laid down from the very start' (286). The fictional Anne 'quits the world without regret' (286) and, like Lucy Klatschko, enters a convent. It is in Murdoch's fiction then that one finds her attempt at understanding Sister Marian's captivating psychology, and by implication her own.

Iris Murdoch's 21 letters to Sister Marian are, as usual, all undated, so attributing their contents to any specific events is something of a detection game, but a location is usually given, which allows for some chronological accuracy, and references to certain events permit more precision. To Conradi Sister Marian reveals that there had been many more letters between her and Iris, but the majority had been long destroyed, and she could not bear to part with some of her 'lovely postcards' from Iris.[26] As such the remaining letters provide only a *glimpse* of this friendship. For the most part they are hurried and scrawled, written in a characteristic tunnel shape down the centre of the page that

[19] Letter to Conradi, 2 January, 1998. Sister Marian noted in her letter of 9 January 1998 that this 'blew over' and certainly Murdoch came to take Sister Marian's criticism more lightly: 'I am very busy writing one of those dreadful novels!' she says light-heartedly in one of the letters.
[20] Letter to Conradi, 2 January, 1998.
[21] Letter to Conradi, January, 1999.
[22] Letter to Conradi, November, 1998.
[23] In the letter to Conradi dated January, 1999.
[24] Letter to Conradi, August, 1998.
[25] Conradi first noted this in his essay, "The Metaphysical Hostess", *ELH* 48 (summer 1981), pp.427-53.
[26] Letter to Conradi, 9 January, 1998.

suggests Iris is attempting to make them appear longer than they actually are – a sign, perhaps, of her emotional promiscuity, her need to be thought well of, of not to be seen to be forgetting her friends, and as a result spreading herself too thinly. (Honor Tracy describes Murdoch's letters as 'hurried scrawls'.) Assuming that the earliest two letters from St Anne's are in fact recording Iris's feelings on Lucy's acceptance into Stanbrook, and were thus written around 1954, there is a gap of several years between those and three letters from Steeple Aston which were written a decade apart, one in 1958, one in 1966 and one in 1978. Two letters from Hamilton Road, Oxford, were sent in February 1987 and in the summer of 1989 respectively, and the final 14 letters that were sent from Charlbury Road, Oxford, mostly come from the period between 1989 and 1992, and it is this batch that holds the most sustained and coherent discussions about faith and belief. By 1995 the signs of Alzheimer's were becoming evident in her increasingly fragmented sentences.

The fact that almost without exception these letters are unaffectedly dashed off also means that they are unpremeditated and undigested and thus unfettered by the need to construct any larger image of herself. They have an openness and honesty that are both poignant and moving, and their constancy holds as much meaning as their flimsiness. The letters are fragmented, sometimes cryptic ('I am not sure what the "excellent retreat" was or "his charm"'); they occasionally offer bizarre, dislocated thoughts or an intimacy hastily followed by a banality ('God filling empty spaces . . . yes. We are keeping warm here and I hope you are'). By comparison with the well-structured, tightly controlled form of her novels, these letters are untidy, rambling, emotionally messy and reveal a self-effacing, humble woman – very like, in fact, the 'good man' who haunts her novels. And rather than demonstrating any development of the friendship between these two women, they exhibit an enduring loving stasis.

Many of the letters provide a thought-provoking one-sided dialogue: 'I was very touched and pleased and somehow happily amused at your "rum" thoughts', says Murdoch, but we never know the nature of these 'rum' thoughts or much about the nature of Sister Marian's stories ('thank you for the stories you tell me'). One seems to have been about her father, 'who you felt you had never known', and one 'about the Jewish grandfather and his adventures'. Sister Marian has confided 'difficulties', to which Murdoch responds, but is careful to note in the margin that she is aware that they are 'not doubts', as if she is afraid of offending by misinterpreting the nature of these 'problems'. Franz Steiner, with whom Murdoch was deeply in love, was the subject of at least one exchange: 'Thank you for your mention of Franz Steiner whom I loved so much – such a sweet great man, but died so early'.

Surprisingly, there are only occasional fragments of sustained theological discussion ('we did not indulge in deep speculation which I am quite incapable of', wrote Sister Marian to John Bayley), and these exchanges are to be found in the letters of the late eighties and the early nineties:

> Yes, the loss of Christianity is terrible – young people (young students I know children of friends etc.) know nothing about it. I think that Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism find it easier to handle what is holy, what is good – to keep it in a changing scene. I mean the literalistic pictures of God as a person and that Christ rose and so on, are too crudely taken – there must be some transition (we who are not Jesus etc.) suffer from the awful crude character of the technological age.

In a postscript Murdoch has added, 'Christ must never be absent'. There are occasional references to her own beliefs: 'I am rather encouraged with Buddhism, that is I have general (English) Buddhist friends[27] and have met their Buddhist (Tibetan etc) friends. If only Christianity and Buddhism could merge', and once, in exasperation, 'the concepts of mysteries might help save us in the next century. Love might, say: what else can'. Deference and humility are always implicit: 'What you say about Eckhart and Simone Weil and also Buddhism – do go on about this – Nirvana or happy move to death – you know so much and I nothing'. And in more confident and mischievous mood, she tells Sister Marian that she is 'delighted with your new Pope! So good to see an honest northern face after all those foxy Italians! And a formidable man. Perhaps he will lead a new crusade'.

In the early onset of Alzheimer's Iris found some difficulty in reconciling Lucy/Marian's dual identity, and perhaps more difficulty in separating Lucy from herself: 'I am very sorry', she apologises, 'I can't get away from Lucy now – but of course now I recall Sister Marian'. Once she asks, 'ought I to call you Lucy, I mean on envelopes?' and a P.S on the same letter says, 'I've now gone over to Sister Marian' – but all the letters, without exception, are addressed to 'Lucy'. In whatever guise, Lucy/Sister Marian was a continuous spiritual presence: 'I have always been picturing you', says Iris, 'I think of the past and you and me in the past'. She appears at this stage in her life to be meditating on what it would be like to *be* Lucy: 'I think of you and that you are a spiritual being', she says, and some kind of mystical communion is hinted at: 'I hope you are well, indeed I know you are, I can feel it'; and later, 'here, and with you, I think – you are praying. I cannot pray'. In a letter probably written soon after the meeting that took place in the late eighties, when Honor Tracy was dying, a wistful envy trespasses: 'you look so young and beautiful and the spirit is with you'.

The letters record Murdoch's grief at Honor's death: 'Yes, I miss Honor very much', writes Iris (in the margin is written 'I loved her very much'). 'I was surprised that she died', the letter continues, 'God filling empty spaces, like in Eckhart, yes', and she offers comfort for Sister Marian: 'As you know, you were her greatest support and shone with brightness in her life and enlivened her faith'. Other, deeper, more secret intimacies seem to have been shared: 'I was very touched that you should have felt like writing so', writes Iris from Steeple Aston and she, in turn, confides to Lucy when her own work is proving difficult: 'The stuff I am writing now has all gone wrong, and somehow your letter, in this connexion, was a blessing'. They sometimes even shared their dreams: 'Thank you so much for your letter with the sad dream and the strange fancy dream'.

These letters are, simply, letters of love, written from the heart. Some are sent for almost no other reason than to sustain some form of communication**.** In the very last letters, when Iris talks about her final novel, *Jackson's Dilemma*, the insecurities that dogged her in those early days at Somerville (to which her memory often returns) seem to have resurfaced, or never to have gone away. When she shyly articulates a wish for Lucy to have a copy of the new book, she asks humbly if it would be 'in order' if she were to send one. One of the letters bears a note from Sister Marian stating that Iris's next letter has been destroyed, 'as I could see that she was really ill'. There is a harrowing poignancy in these brief notes which allow a fleeting glimpse of the blank confusion claiming Murdoch's mind: 'Please forgive my chaos [. . .] I have a feeling of the autumn [. . .] I feel tired. Quietness is here. I

[27] From dates Peter Conradi thinks that these friends are probably Andrew Harvey and himself.

accept it. I wish I could speak, talk, have tears (well anyway tears come). The evening, blue sky, floating clouds. I think about you and long ago'.

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Carol Graham-Harrison,[28] an exact contemporary of Klatschko at Somerville, recalled Lucy pointing out two spiders in her Somerville rooms: 'or maybe it's one spider', Lucy quipped, leading a double life' (PC). In some sense Lucy Klatschko and Iris Murdoch vicariously lived each other's life; each woman was wholly committed to their own inimitable journey, but could not prevent themselves casting a benign eye, each on the other, watching each other's advancement, sometimes with wonderment and awe, at other times with irritation and occasionally with envy. In a letter to John Bayley when Iris had become very ill, Sister Marian asks him to 'tell Iris a dream I had – she and I were walking along and I said I thought we had better put our haloes away otherwise people might think we were showing off'. Both haloes have now been put away. When Iris died in February 1999 she was certainly in Sister Marian's prayers: 'I am so sad about dear Iris', she wrote to John in November 1997, 'I do hope she is not suffering [. . .] give her my love in abundance [. . .] my love and prayers to you both'.[29]

Peter Conradi remembers how in the summer of 1999 John Bayley and he drove to Stanbrook Abbey to meet her. He and John were greeted, after a wait, by

> a frail but happy little figure, with very blue eyes and a still beautiful face, in full habit, moving slowly on a zimmer-frame. She spoke, in gently accented English, of her childhood, of Iris, and much more.
>
> We embraced on leaving, and John, who was in grief, wept briefly afterwards at her wasted life, surmising that – to have wished to have become a nun – she must have suffered a disappointment in love. The religious life, he seemed to feel, was self-deceived. He did not much buy into Iris's celebration of the beauty of holiness. I took, silently, another view.

Sister Marian died at Stanbrook Abbey on 15th August 2001.

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'Divine though Unfinished': Letters to Roly Cochrane

Probably in the winter of 1984/85 a 43 year-old American would-be writer got hold of Iris Murdoch's address, possibly via *Who's Who*, and started to send her many, many home-made cards. She would later refer to these abstractions, or pictures of fenland, which were made by a method she suggested he

[28] Née Stewart, and English translator of Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (PC).
[29] Two letters to John Bayley from Sister Marian dated 8 and 30 November, probably 1997.

might market, as ‘mysterious’, and ‘splendidly murky’. The cards bore messages of encouragement, and – almost certainly – admiration.

His communications to Murdoch do not survive, but from the four letters she sent him in response before she and John left Steeple Aston (1986) he must have hit upon an uncannily direct tone of address. Possibly she preferred such an approach to the reverential: in any event it seems to have produced one of the *coups de foudre* to which she was always susceptible. He somehow seized her imagination.

These early cards were signed only by his first name – Roly – and also vouch-safed no address until March, probably of 1985, when she was thus enabled to reply: ‘I thought perhaps you would eventually add your address. Perhaps now you will also divulge your surname. I imagine you to be an American. I'm interested to hear you are a writer, I thought you might be’. As for his style, we may gather that he employed a mysteriously concise simplicity: Dame Iris wrote to him c 1990, ‘I may try to send you a book. I am sorry you so briefly passed through London. *I am writing in your style. It's good’* [my emphasis].

Thus began a correspondence of nearly 150 letters and 50 or so cards, that continued until Murdoch's death. Having won his address, she fretted for a decade about losing it, requesting him to write it, when he in future sends her a card, a fraction further to the left, so that enthusiastic postmen cannot ‘frank’ over and obscure it. By June 1985 he had written at length about his life, but leaving many loose ends for Murdoch further to ponder. She replied unsystematically, offering – as so often in her letters to friends – a warm-hearted and affirming commentary on some points, and requesting further information. ‘I assumed the writer of the postcards was about 30’, she says, trying (despite a polite disclaimer) to elicit his real age, starting to squirrel away details of his life, trying to build up a picture, as she did (differently) with friends and fictional characters alike.

They seem at once to have fallen into a mutually protective intimacy that was imaginatively stimulating and rare at this stage of her life. By 15 December (probably 1985) she is communicating about spirituality, charging most Christian communities with hypocrisy, and also writing – marvellously and helpfully – of egolessness. Unlike Zen Buddhists, but like the Tibetans, she wrote not of destroying the ego but of side-stepping it, noting *en passant* that this was hard to do:

> Of course one cannot shed one's ego, & *not* (initially, allegedly) having one *is a way* of having one [my emphasis]. *Talking* about it high-mindedly and/or in a book is another way, One cannot see the high places where real non-egoism, perhaps, takes place.

With Roly she also broke her own unspoken rule never to enter into discussion of her own work. ‘I am interested that you regard *An Accidental Man* as a turning point. (I wd say *An Unofficial Rose*) […] I don't think you will like *The Good Apprentice* [due out that autumn], or the one I'm writing now, so much.’ In other letters she is grateful that he likes, successively, *The Red and the Green* (‘no-one has cared much about it’) and *The Time of the Angels* (‘which no-one seems to notice’), works whose merits she feels have been overlooked or ignored. In 1991 she wrote, with an equally strange and

child-like openness, ‘I think my hand-writing is *excellent*, I *love* it. I *love writing* with my fine Mont Blanc pen’. This pen, she wrote in another, ‘greets yours’.

By June 1985 she already contemplated a meeting, and wrote, ‘The question must arise sometimes of whether & when (& where) we eventually meet’, warning, ‘It may be a mistake to meet a writer whose work you like’.

In March 1986 the Bayleys moved to 68 Hamilton Road, where they lived for two years, a time during which she wrote Roly two dozen letters. On 18-19 October that year they went to Amsterdam, where Roly lived. Iris and John had gone for, among other things, a conference on her work that I gave a talk at, and I happened to witness their meeting. I recall a youthful and pleasant-looking American smartly turned out in jeans who, John remarked, ‘had been sending Iris original cards’. On return Iris wrote (26 October) that the old days when Roly wrote ‘incognito’ had now gone: ‘Now we advance. I'm so glad we met, it was for me wholly delightful. I think our (important) letter-writing personae are not thereby damaged, rather enriched. You remain suitably mysterious’.

There is a dream-like facility about this epistolary friendship that recalls the surreal quality both of Dame Iris's novels and of so many episodes and relationships throughout her life. Fantasy versus imagination: which obtains here? Her correspondence shows the inextricability of the two that is in evidence also within the fiction. He had written a novel, *Facing Reality* (unpublished), which Murdoch admired, and sent suggestions about.

She complains to Roly of many letters from others demanding a lecture, a subscription, a review, advice on how to write a novel, or get into Oxford. His letters were different. She attends closely to his problems, thinks hard about them, and offers advice that is born of affection and in no way mechanical or reflex. Her extraordinary gift of making each correspondent and friend feel uniquely apprehended is palpable, an exercise in attention, that Simone Weil word, and of love.

She discloses some things only to him: that she admired and re-read Mann's *Buddenbrooks*. And that she wrote the blurbs for her novels because she found the novel-blurbs written by others ‘terrible’. It was tiresome, yet even blurbs could be seen as ‘little works-of-art and a chance to say what the novel was about without giving away the plot’. As for the riddle or problem of life, Wittgenstein had written in *Tractatus* 6.5 and 6.521 that ‘The riddle does not exist […] The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem’.

In March 1996 Murdoch, John Bayley and Audi Villers went to Delft and the Hague to see the Vermeers (a visit that inspired John to write his novel *The Red Hat*). Iris, who knew she was in Holland but otherwise was beginning to lose her grip, spoke non-stop of Roly, of her need to see him, of the importance of John or Audi finding a way to contact him. She described the frustrations of this trip on her return in a letter that starts ‘I have no idea how I discovered you, I don't know anyone who knew you’.

During the 1990s Roly and Murdoch each suffered disaster. As in so many of her close friendships Murdoch seemed to find a life in contemplation of which she could make sense of her own,

and *vice versa.* There is at least an uncanny echo between the ways she and Roly each managed to wring some small triumph out of terrible adversity, out of a life going catastrophically wrong.

While bicycling in Amsterdam in 1991, Roly was hit by a large lorry, suffering irreparable hip and leg injuries and loss of long-term memory. He dealt with these afflictions, at least in his letters to Murdoch, with an extraordinary courage rewarded by a kind of grace or joy that reminded Murdoch of Simone Weil. She suffered at his plight, as always at the afflictions of friends, and wrote him dozens of letters. Some excerpts at random: 'I trust you have ever so many friends and admirers'; 'you have *shown* me so *much*'; and 'you are out in some sort of huge meadow. You are a spiritual fellow', and 'There is a *tension* – the next century is waiting'.

A few years later she wrote to Roly: 'I feel under a burden. What is it?' We by now know more than we need about Dame Iris's burden, and probably half of her letters to Roly were written as her illness advanced, and bear its terrible stigmata ('Perhaps you could arrive suddenly like an angel – well, you *are* an angel'). Three are unfinished but were found and sent on with affectionate notes by John. It is striking, and very moving, to read from a letter, probably from early 1997[1], 'Iris and Roly are stronger than the dark forces'. And from another, containing a wonderful phrase that sums up so much of her own spiritual search and, perhaps, of its fruition, 'For a while I was very an/axious [*sic*]…*Now everything is divine, though unfinished'* [my emphasis].

I have been pondering why these words hit me with such force, why they suggest what might – with due irony – be called an apotheosis. Certainly she suffered anguish during the last months and years: that could be seen and felt. But '*Now everything is divine, though unfinished*' addresses the joy she also found, one that is hard to detach from her religious sense of the world. She always found the world a place of astonishment, in sickness as much as in health.

This was a period in which Iris and John spent one week in three with us and our dog in Wales – perhaps eight months in aggregate. I had not realised until reading this run – or had not recalled – that she was, in 1997, still writing letters, and was struck by 'I am not doing much just at present except for going to Wales. (People laugh at Wales, only they shouldn't. The mountains are very good)', and by '[a] *lovely doggy* usually comes'. She recalled Roly's name late in her illness, when only experiences and names that had cut deep had survived.

She died in February 1999. 'Beware of these erotic chaps', she had advised, in one of a number of letters touching briefly upon Roly's love-life. Roly Cochrane died in February 2002.

Peter Conradi

Emeritus Professor, Kingston University

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[1] Date deduced since she also writes: 'I shall be walking and wondering [*sic*] in Wales'. In 1996 she visited Wales twice only, June and October; while by late 1997 letter-writing was surely becoming much harder.

A Most Uncritical Critique: Looking at Murdoch's Textual Notes for Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (1962)

There is a treasure of unmined research nuggets in the Iris Murdoch Oxford Library, housed at Kingston University. For the truly bilingual, there is a thick notebook, in French and English, which Murdoch amassed in preparation for her early study of Jean-Paul Sartre. A first English edition of Simone Weil's *Waiting on God* (1951) is heavily annotated and replete with enthusiastically positive commentary. And, among still other gems, there is a thought-provoking, carefully-read proof copy of Nobel laureate Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (1962). Crowded on the last few pages of Canetti's book are Murdoch's comments and impressions, ranging from brief queries and mere abbreviations of Canetti's concepts to critical assessments and comparisons with other thinkers.

The reader of Murdoch's annotations is quickly made aware that she was looking toward a review of the work, and one duly appeared in the *Spectator* in September 1962. Already on the first page of her nine pages of notes (page 471 of Canetti's text [hereafter referenced by page numbers alone]), Murdoch writes, 'one would have to be a polymath to review this', followed in the next line by 'I am far from being the polymath who would be [the] ideal reviewer'. And, sure enough, her review of the book, entitled 'Mass, Might and Myth', begins 'I am not the polymath who would be the ideal reviewer of this remarkable book' (*Existentialists and Mystics* [hereafter *E&M*] 187).

Similarly, Murdoch's belief in the great worth of Canetti's work is a thread throughout her notes, and is evident in the published review, though her initial idea of opening her critique with 'this is a real work on moral philosophy' (484) was abandoned. A bit more than halfway through her reading, Murdoch notes that Canetti's text 'has the simplicity and clarity of a great work' (484). And twice later Murdoch writes of *Crowds and Power* that it is 'a very large object' (464, 496), terms repeated in her *Spectator* review (*E&M* .187, 192).

There is great charm in witnessing an acute mind like Murdoch's grappling with a large, multi-faceted book and shaping a response. One often finds early queries and doubts being resolved, some within the textual notes themselves, and others only in the published review. Surveying Murdoch's published essay in the light cast by her textual notes reveals an editing process that may derive from completing and more fully comprehending Canetti's *magnum opus* or (and?) from emotional intensity felt for an erstwhile lover.

In the *Spectator* review, virtually all negative criticism has been suppressed. Whereas Murdoch might betray an aggravated impatience in her notes – 'Reject this high-handed definition of freedom,' or a little later: 'threat of death made harmless [. . .] come come!' (495) – one looks in vain for any corrective suggestion in her public commentary.

Murdoch goes even further, whether upon more mature reflection on the merits of Canetti's text, or following a short period of emotional wrangling. Her textual notes show concern with the lack of development in Canetti's argument regarding Christianity and the Church. Though she notes Canetti's hint of a later, separate work on religion, and the author's acknowledgement that, in Murdoch's words, 'religion not fully dealt with here' (471), she several times objects to Canetti's treatment of the religion. On page 471 we read 'C does not face problem of Christianity? [. . .] Unfair

to RC Church . . .' and further on: 'Not enough about Christianity!' (463). This judgement of Canetti's lack of considered analysis is transformed in Murdoch's published critique. She writes, 'his book is full of starting points, embryo theories, sudden independent illuminations. When he says of Christianity, for instance [. . .] that it is a 'religion of lament [. . .] he is giving us new means of thinking which [. . .] contain their own ambiguities' (*E&M* 190).

Perhaps the most striking theme, if that word is appropriate in discussing notes and annotations, concerns Canetti's neglect of Marx and Freud. Especially noteworthy is the omission of the latter, given that Canetti devotes two chapters to Daniel Paul Schreber, whose autobiography Freud famously interpreted (1911). But Canetti's analysis is not founded upon Freud's work. Despite Murdoch's frequent queries concerning the potential influence of both Freud and Marx, and Canetti's reluctance to cite them as authorities, she reaches a different perspective in a later note: 'A marvellous creation quite outside the bounds of Freud and Marx!' (482). On her last page of comments, Murdoch refines this somewhat: 'Freud, Jung, etc not mentioned. We would like to 'place' EC in relation to them. But why should he mention? Cf Wittgenstein.' She concludes: 'EC as <u>artist</u> won't mention proper names – ditto Wittgenstein' (496). This justification, of course, raises the question of an 'artist's' qualifications for writing what is intended as a serious scholarly work, and Murdoch modifies her stance (rationalization?) in her published review. *Crowds and Power*, she writes, 'is also a <u>great</u> original work on a vitally important subject, and provides us with an eminence from which we can take a new look at Marx and Freud' (*E&M* 191-92).

The process of converting what originally appeared as a weakness into a strength reaches a climax in the evolution of the greatest and most obvious objection one might have about Canetti's text. Like many readers, Murdoch, early in her perusal, is struck by the author's broad conclusions, offered without attribution. On her second page of notes, Murdoch writes: 'Phds & scientists will ask – is it true? How does he know? And they'll be right to ask [. . .] But humane sciences can't be quite so scientific – yet or <u>ever</u>. Can't have absolute certainty or perfect (any?) team work [. . .]' (482). The first of these thoughts is turned on its head in the *Spectator* review: 'How does one judge a large-scale theory of this sort?', Murdoch asks. 'Clearly there is no point in just saying impatiently, well is it true or not? The question is, how much will it explain [. . .]' (*E&M* 188). What remains constant is Murdoch's doubt about the efficacy of teamwork. She concludes her published critique with an even stronger statement to that effect: 'we should remind ourselves that in the obscure and disputed field of 'the study of human nature' we cannot rely upon the piecemeal efforts of teams of merely competent scientists. We need and we shall always need the visions of great imaginers and solitary men of genius' (*E&M* 192).

Murdoch's original motivation for composing a most uncritical critique of Canetti's *Crowds and Power* is not likely to be unearthed. Did a completed reading of a work that does, truly, cover an immense range finally convince her that she should overlook what she might have determined to be minor objections? Did Canetti, upon Murdoch's patient reflection, ultimately address the queries and shortcomings she noted? Or were the scholarly lapses filtered out by an emotional sieve? These are questions which Murdoch's notes and annotations can raise, but not answer. Her immediate reactions, when juxtaposed with her published review in the *Spectator*, offer a glimpse of her mind at work, and

perhaps of her emotional attachment as well. They are an example of the potential richness for scholarly research still lying untouched at Kingston University.

Mark Luprecht
University of Tennessee

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Editorial Column

Report on the Iris Murdoch Panel at the 2006 Twentieth-Century Literature Conference at the University of Louisville on 23- 25 February 2006.

Barbara Heusel chaired a panel on Iris Murdoch's use of art at the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, Louisville, Kentucky. The panel consisted of three eclectic papers on this topic. Barbara Heusel's paper, 'What Justifies Artifice in a Twentieth-century Novel? Murdoch's *The Black Prince*', suggested ways in which Murdoch employs philosophy, psychology, history, theology and works of art of all kinds to inspire her and her characters to record the world precisely – without illusion. The paper concentrated on the mythological, literary, philosophical, and psychological concepts in *The Black Prince*, a novel about the competition between two London novelists, and compared its artifice favourably with that of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. This point led to lively discussion following the presentations.

J. Robert Baker's paper, entitled 'Iris Murdoch's Absent Artists', acknowledged Peter Conradi's discussion of the artist and the saint in Murdoch's fiction in *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, and Anne Rowe's study of the importance of individual pieces of art in the various novels in *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch*. He then proposed a tentative hypothesis that there is an absent artist in many of Murdoch's novels - the artist behind the art - and considered the absent artist rather that the artist distinguished from the saint which Conradi discusses in his work. Though not Murdoch's ideal, one type of artist in her fiction is the magician, such as Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, who seeks to create a kind of order by compelling and coercing other characters to behave according to the artist's manipulative designs. Another type comprises those artists who are not characters but whose work, nevertheless, has a large role in a number of novels. One example is in *A Severed Head*, where Audubon and the valuable prints of his work reinforce the moral difficulties that Martin-Lynch-Gibbon and his family must face. Baker argued that Audubon's artistic practice aligns him with Murdoch's magician characters, so his prints become part of the fog in which Martin and others operate.

Cheryl Bove's paper, 'Sacred Spaces: Art and Museums in the Role of the Sacred in Iris Murdoch's Aesthetics and Novels', argued that increasingly in Murdoch's work art fulfils the role of the sacred and that art galleries have become sacred spaces for her characters. At moments of crisis her characters return again and again to the National Gallery, or to the Wallace Collection, or to the British

Museum to verify the centres in their lives. This tendency reflects Murdoch's aesthetics, where great art transcends time and culture in conveying truth, and her Platonism, where Good replaces God as the formula for truth. Murdoch's novels celebrate the sacred made possible by love and art, and the spaces to which her characters attend are the spaces that provide a sense of awe and wonder that has been associated with the sacred since ancient times. Murdoch makes this perfectly clear in *The Good Apprentice* when she describes the British Museum as 'a palace of light and wisdom' (pp.247-48).

The topic for the Murdoch panel for the 2007 Twentieth-century Literature Conference that will take place 22-24 February 2007 will be the various aspects of space in Murdoch's fiction. Anyone interested in submitting a proposal for this panel or in suggesting topics for future panels should contact Barbara Heusel at bheusel@englishfsu.edu

Cheryl Bove
Ball State University

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The Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies

Iris Murdoch Special Collections at Kingston University

The Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies, which is part of Kingston University's Archives and Special Collections, was established by the acquisition of two important collections in 2004. Iris Murdoch's working library, from her study in Oxford, was acquired after a successful public appeal for funds. The Library contains 1071 items, including books on philosophy, religion, poetry, literature, and history, as well as music manuscripts and some archival items. It is hugely enriched by extensive annotations and comments on the texts written by Iris Murdoch in the endpapers of many of the books.

It was followed by the acquisition of the material that Professor Peter Conradi, Iris Murdoch's authorized biographer, had gathered and created during his detailed research for the biography. This valuable archive contains copies of articles and press cuttings by and about Iris Murdoch, correspondence and interviews with people who knew her, materials documenting her family history, education and career, information about important people in her life, copies of letters written by Iris Murdoch, and a large number of original letters from Iris Murdoch to Peter Conradi.

Since the official launch of the Iris Murdoch Centre at the second Iris Murdoch Conference in September 2004, we have continued to acquire archives relating to Iris Murdoch and we hope to add more in the future. We would welcome contact from anyone who has material relating to the life and/or work of Iris Murdoch and would like to find a safe and secure home where it will be preserved and made available to the large community of scholars researching her work.

The following archive material has been added to the Centre's collections:

197 letters, cards and postcards written by Iris Murdoch to Roly Cochrane between the early 1980s and late 1990s.

6 letters from Iris Murdoch to Cheryl Bove written between 1990 and 1992. Presented by Cheryl Bove.

34 letters from Iris Murdoch to Sugana Ramanathan written between 1985 and 1995. Presented by Sugana Ramanathan.

A typescript, with corrections, of the paper 'Nostalgia for the Particular', which was read by Iris Murdoch to the Aristotelian Society on 9 June 1952.

2 letters from Iris Murdoch to Harry Hofstra. Presented by Harry Hofstra in 2004.

1 letter from Iris Murdoch to Miss P. Stringer.

Photographs of Iris Murdoch taken during her visit to the University of California in 1984. Presented by Janine Canan.

2 books once belonging to Iris Murdoch, one with annotations. Presented by Rachel Fenner.

Additional research papers and books, including a number of books by and about Elias Canetti, acquired from Professor Peter Conradi.

In February 2006 I was appointed as Archivist at Kingston University. I am responsible for the development, preservation and care of the Iris Murdoch collections as well as other archives and special collections held by the University. The catalogue of the books in the Iris Murdoch Library has already been completed and during the next year I am aiming to complete the cataloguing of the Conradi archive and other new material and to make it available to be searched on line.

Enquiries and researchers wishing to consult the Iris Murdoch archives at Kingston University are very welcome. We are open, by prior appointment, on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Email: archives@kingston.ac.uk or contact me directly at e.ruddell@kingston.ac.uk. Phone: (+44) 020 8547 7101. Postal address: Jane Ruddell, Kingston University Archives and Special Collections, Information Services, Penhryn Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey. KT1 2EE, United Kingdom.

Jane Ruddell, Archivist, Kingston University

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The Iris Murdoch Society

The Iris Murdoch News Letter is the publication of The Iris Murdoch Society, which was formed at the Modern Language Association Convention in New York City in December 1986. It appears annually, offering a forum for short articles, reviews and notices, and keeps members of the society informed of new publications, symposia and other news that has a bearing on the life and work of Iris Murdoch.

If you would like to join the Iris Murdoch Society and automatically receive the News Letter please write to the American or European contact.

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Treasurer's Report: The Star Financial Bank (USA) balance as of 30 June 2006 was $812.48. The Iris Murdoch Society balance in the Halifax Building Society, Kingston, Surrey, UK as of 30 June 2006 was £710.21